

NEWSLETTER OF THE IUCN SSC ASIAN SONGBIRD TRADE SPECIALIST GROUP

DAWN CHORUS

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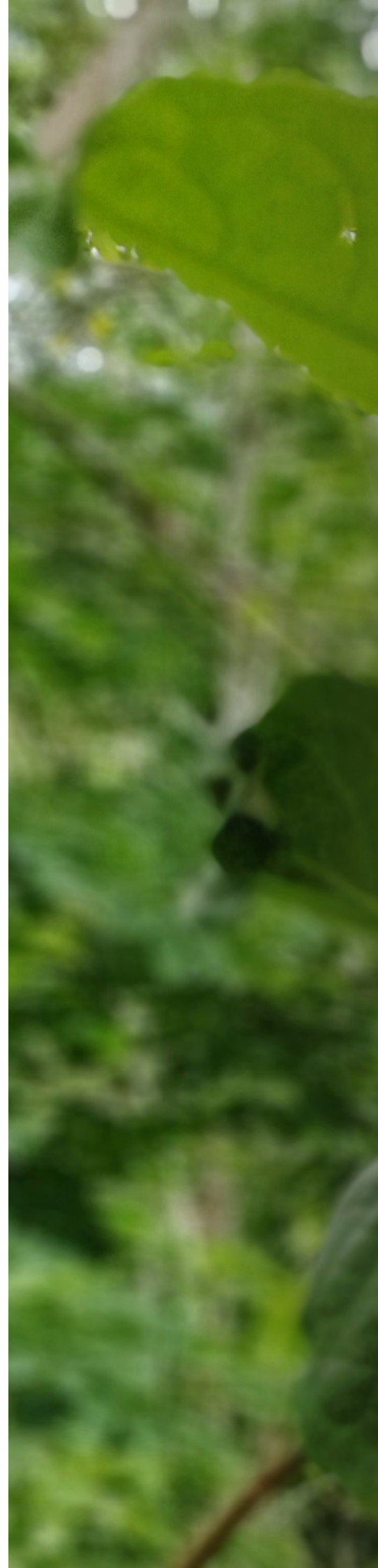
DAWN CHORUS Vol 1(1) | September 2021
Newsletter of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade
Specialist Group

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and Jeggo, D.

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FOREWORD BY DAVID JEGGO¹

¹ Chair of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG)

I am delighted to be able to welcome you to ASTSG's first newsletter, Dawn Chorus, just one of the developments in our communications alongside the website and various social media platforms, all made possible by the appointment of our Communications Coordinator, Sofiya Shukhova. It follows the publication of "[A Brief Report On Its First Four Years](#)" which outlined ASTSG's activities and achievements since 2017.

At the first Songbird Crisis Summit held at the Jurong Bird Park, Singapore in 2015, five themes were considered the most important to address the harmful effects of the unsustainable trade in songbirds. These themes were adopted by ASTSG in forming its sub-groups and this newsletter follows this arrangement, devoting a section to each. The contributions clearly demonstrate the wide range of activities in which our members are engaged and the advancements that are being made, all the more remarkable in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. These show how we are gaining a far better insight into and understanding of the issues involved and how this enhanced knowledge enables the development of possible solutions. Progress is being made but, if asked 'are we doing enough?' then surely the answer is no, much more needs to be done.

At each update of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, more Asian songbirds are listed as threatened due to the effect of the trade in them, while others already listed are given a higher category of threat. The complexities of taxonomy continue to complicate the picture, with taxa not considered for Red Listing such as the Shama taxa endemic to the Barusan Island (featured in this newsletter), nonetheless being of great concern to ASTSG. Furthermore, a recent [paper](#) by Nigel Collar and Bas van Balen documents the extraordinary demise of the Javan Pied Starling, itself only recently recognised as a full species. This acts as a stark reminder of how 'at risk' some of these songbirds are, as it charts the complete disappearance from the wild of what was formerly an abundant and widespread bird.

I hope you enjoy reading this first issue of Dawn Chorus and I look forward to it becoming an increasingly important insight into ASTSG, providing regular updates on its members' varied activities.

- David Jeggo

TRADE AND LEGISLATION



photo by Royal Malaysian Police

Malaysian authorities intercepted a shipment of Oriental Magpie-robins being smuggled by sea to Indonesia



photo by PERHILITAN
Oriental Magpie-robin

SOURCING FROM FURTHER AFIELD: CROSS-BORDER SMUGGLING OF SONGBIRDS

Written by Serene C.L. Chng^{1,2}

¹ [TRAFFIC International Southeast Asia](#)

² Specialist Group Coordinator and Member of Trade and Legislation sub-group, ASTSG

As local populations dwindle from heavy trapping pressure, traders start searching further afield to source songbirds. In recent years, there has been increasing evidence of songbird smuggling across countries and provinces.

Case in point: a recent [study](#) highlighted increasingly large numbers of Oriental Magpie-robins (*Copsychus saularis*) seized while being smuggled from Malaysia to Indonesia in recent years. From January 2015 - November 2020, authorities seized over 26,928 Oriental Magpie-robins in 43 incidents

that implicated Malaysia. A confirmed 17,292 (64%) birds were being smuggled from Malaysia to Indonesia; this number could be even higher. Two-thirds of all birds were seized in 2020 alone. This could be due to an increase in enforcement effort, coupled with dwindling populations in parts of Indonesia, driving sourcing from Malaysia where the species is still common.

Many cases involved smuggling from Peninsular Malaysia to Sumatra, particularly by sea from southeast Johor to the Riau Islands. Birds were also smuggled overland from

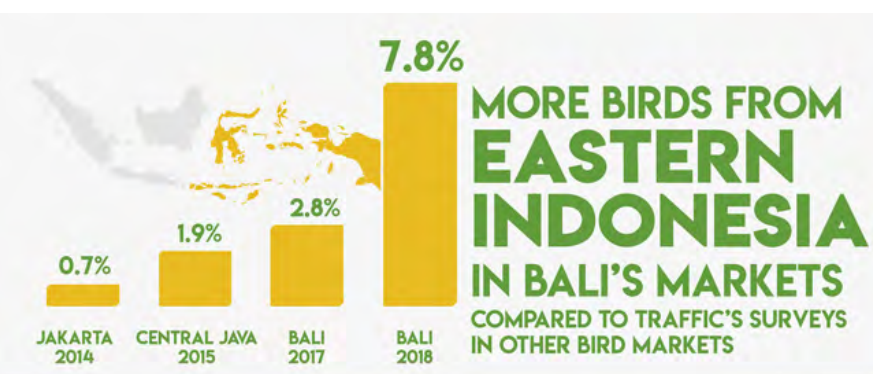
Sarawak to West Kalimantan. Malaysian and Indonesian suspects were arrested, sometimes both in the same case. This indicates organised networks in both countries.

Even within Indonesia, birds are being sourced from islands and provinces further afield to feed the demand. In January 2021 alone, [Indonesian authorities seized a whopping 11,559 birds](#), mostly songbirds. A vast majority originated from Sumatra, destined for markets in Java. Lampung province recorded the most seizure incidents of any province, and almost two-thirds of all birds seized in Indonesia in January. Lampung sits at the southern tip of Sumatra and is a short hop to Java where Indonesia's largest bird markets are. It is also home to Bakauheni port, which connects Sumatra to Java. Several enforcement agencies made the seizures, including quarantine, police, port authorities, and nature conservation agencies, with support from conservation groups.

Corroborating these seizure analyses findings are market surveys in Indonesia that have recorded a rise in species sourced from less accessible localities. [Inventories of bird markets in Bali in 2017 and 2018](#) found that more species not typically seen in trade, from less accessible locations like eastern Indonesian islands and montane habitats, were recorded in 2018 than 2017.

Except for non-native target species, songbirds have typically been sourced close to where the demand is. Smuggling birds across provincial and national borders incurs greater costs and risks, especially as enforcement vigilance against bird smuggling is at an all-time high. That traders choose to do this suggests that wild populations close to demand centres have become worryingly scarce.

The immense effort by enforcement agencies, especially at border locations, must be applauded. However, cross-border smuggling is challenging to regulate. Co-ordination across different countries, agencies and organisations is needed to tackle smuggling across provinces and countries. This will enable effective investigation and disruption of trafficking chains from source to market. Ensuring adequate protection for targeted species in source countries, such as Oriental Magpie-robins in Malaysia, is also essential. To truly tackle the root of this conservation challenge, we need to work towards reducing demand for wild songbirds, while ensuring that the perpetrators behind the illegal trade chain are effectively disrupted through successful prosecution.



visual by TRAFFIC

MAKING CITES WORK FOR SONGBIRDS

Written by Loretta Shepherd¹

¹ [Monitor Conservation Research Society](#)

Songbirds are trapped in large quantities all over the world, particularly in Southeast Asia. While domestic trade and songbird keeping practices have been existence for generations, increasingly, songbirds are illegally trafficked internationally. But despite this shift, policy and enforcement response to prevent this trade has been lacklustre.

The main tool in existence to regulate international trade is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)), where listings on the appendices offer the opportunity for range, transit and consumer states to monitor legal trade and curb illegal trade. But of the world's 6,599 passerines, a mere 85 - 93 (depending on taxonomy) are listed in the appendices of CITES. Twelve are in Appendix I, 69 species in Appendix II (including three subspecies listed separately) and four in Appendix III.

The vast majority of songbirds in trade are not listed in CITES, despite meeting criteria – but with the next CITES Conference of Parties in 2022, we look to the Parties to take critical steps to address this conservation crisis.

Let's take a look at the Black-throated Laughingthrush (*Garrulax chinensis*) for instance. Protected by domestic legislation in four of its six range states, it is captured and traded in violation of these laws. It is frequently observed in international trade

and seen for sale in non-range countries, such as Indonesia.

Online songbird trade also shows that the species is found for sale in the United States (US), despite no records of import found in the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS). Prices for individuals ranged from USD 500 to USD 1,400 and two social media posts listed available pairs for USD 2,000. The Black-throated Laughingthrush is not included on the list of approved captive-bred species in the US and any personal pets that have received an approved import permit under the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 are not allowed to be sold once in the US. According to two previous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for LEMIS data to query passeriformes imported into the US between 2010 and 2019, there were no Black-throated Laughingthrush reported as imported into the US during that period.

This species has also been observed for sale in the European Union (EU), in blatant disregard of a ban on the import of songbirds there. According to data gleaned from the Songbirds in Trade Database ([SiTDB](#)), a minimum of 40 wild Black-throated Laughingthrush were imported into the EU. The birds were either offered for sale or kept by hobbyists in the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, France and Portugal. In the EU, they are a high-price commodity, in the range of USD 1,200 - 1,800 per individual.

There is no evidence that this species breeds easily in captivity, and it is assumed that the vast majority of the birds observed in trade have indeed been captured from the wild, often in violation of domestic legislation.

The Black-throated Laughingthrush illustrates how urgent international support in the form of a CITES listing would allow for greater monitoring and regulation of the trade, and to prevent trade from range countries where the species is already protected by national legislation, and to inform conservation initiatives before the species becomes further threatened.

It is important to realise, however, that CITES listings are only part of the solution, what is imperative is for national legislation to be enforced and for other protective, preventive methods be put in place. Policies at national levels must be sufficient to prevent over-exploitation of songbirds and to protect threatened species, and enforcement must effectively put a deterrent in place. Monitoring of songbirds in trade must continue to detect trends of concern, to support policy and enforcement efforts and to catalyse timely conservation actions, such as ensuring the inclusion of songbirds threatened by international trade in the appendices of CITES.



photo by Michelle & Peter Wong
Black-throated Laughingthrush

FIELD RESEARCH



photo by Panji Gusti Akbar
Black-winged Myna perched on a savanna tree

POTENTIAL TO BOOST THE POPULATION OF THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED BLACK-WINGED MYNA IN BALURAN NATIONAL PARK, JAVA

Written by Tom Squires^{1,2} & Stuart Marsden^{1,3}

¹ [Manchester Metropolitan University](#)

² Member of Field Research and Conservation Breeding and Reintroduction sub-groups, ASTSG

³ Vice-chair of Field Research sub-group, ASTSG

The Black-winged Myna (*Acridotheres melanopterus*) is endemic to the islands of Java and Bali, Indonesia. Over the last 40 years or so, illegal poaching to supply the cage-bird trade has led to its disappearance throughout its range, and its listing as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. A few small populations exist on Bali, but Baluran National Park now supports probably the last remaining wild population on Java. Tom Squires, PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University, studied the species at Baluran in 2018 in partnership with the national park authority. The aim of the research was to find out where and how many mynas exist in the park, and to identify areas of the park where the species might expand into, and what needs to be done to allow this to happen.

The mynas only really occur in the Bekol savannah area of the park and the first step was to count these birds. Kilometres of walked transects and analysis with distance sampling indicated that there are around 180 individuals (almost certainly 100 - 300) within 12.3 square kilometres (density = 14.3 ± 3.5 per square kilometre). This is probably more birds than have occurred in the park for the last 30 years and is credit to the efforts of the park staff to protect them.

The next step was to identify where else in the park has suitable or near-suitable habitat for the myna and yet the species does not occur at present. We did this using species distribution modelling based on presence points and a detailed habitat map and other landscape level characteristics. We found that an additional 79 km² of the park (30% of its total area) are potentially suitable for the species, but currently unoccupied due to loss and degradation of savanna due to the spread of invasive Thorny Acacia (*Vachellia nilotica*), illegal cattle grazing, and particularly bird trapping.



photo by Tom Squires

The habitat surrounding settlements in the north-east of the park is suitable for Black-winged Myna. A project involving the local community to give birds safety and a nestbox scheme might encourage mynas to expand into the area.

The good news is that the partial clearance of Thorny Acacia by the park staff appears to have assisted a modest population recovery and further clearance is indeed welcome. But to open up further areas of the park to the myna, there must be further efforts to reduce illegal trapping in the park. This requires, we believe, both more effective patrolling of areas of the park away from the main tourist facility at Bekol, and more outreach to the communities that live within and adjacent to the park. Such work with community leaders, fishermen, cattle-keepers, schoolchildren, etc. would not cost a huge amount of money but would greatly benefit the myna. More tricky is creating conditions that are right for the myna in the park's extensive northern section. Here, savanna habitat needs to be allowed to recover by reducing the grazing pressure from domestic

livestock, and a nestbox scheme could be implemented to make up for the lack of mature savanna trees with natural cavities for the mynas.

Despite reports that mynas trapped in Baluran are being offered for sale in East Java, we suggest that a brighter future for the species in the park is feasible. Work in partnership with the national park authority is needed to reduce trapping pressure through enhanced protective vigilance, strong community engagement, and habitat restoration and enhancement. Underpinning this should be regular monitoring of the population size and breeding productivity, which would enable more responsive conservation action to preserve the last wild population of Black-winged Myna on Java.

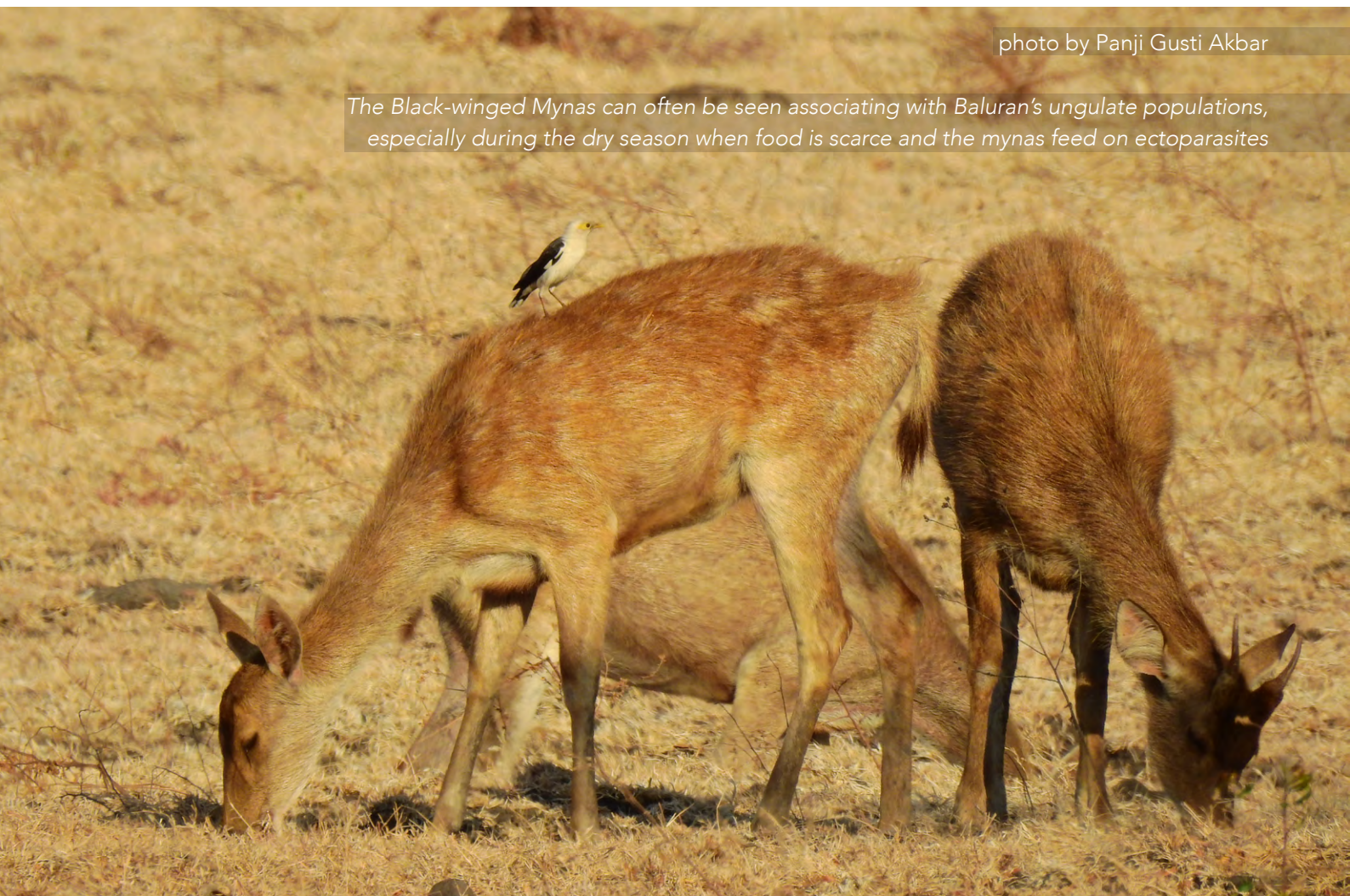


photo by Panji Gusti Akbar

The Black-winged Mynas can often be seen associating with Baluran's ungulate populations, especially during the dry season when food is scarce and the mynas feed on ectoparasites

GENETIC RESEARCH



photo by Jonathan Beilby
Javan Pied Starlings

ROLE OF MUSEUM SAMPLES IN CONSERVATION OF AN ENDANGERED SONGBIRD SPECIES COMPLEX

Written by Pratibha Baveja^{1,2}

¹ [National University of Singapore](#)

² Member of Genetic Research sub-group, ASTSG

Fundamentally, species are often utilised as basic units for conservation. Yet, the species boundaries are often fuzzy, and in-depth research is required to delineate the correct taxonomy. This challenge is exacerbated when the species populations are in decline. In such cases, it is hard to procure samples from the wild due to their rarity. Also, sometimes, the present-day individuals are hybridised with another species which makes it harder to guarantee the purity of the individuals. Both of the discussed reasons plagued our research agenda of exploring the taxonomy of a highly endangered group of starlings from Java and Bali.

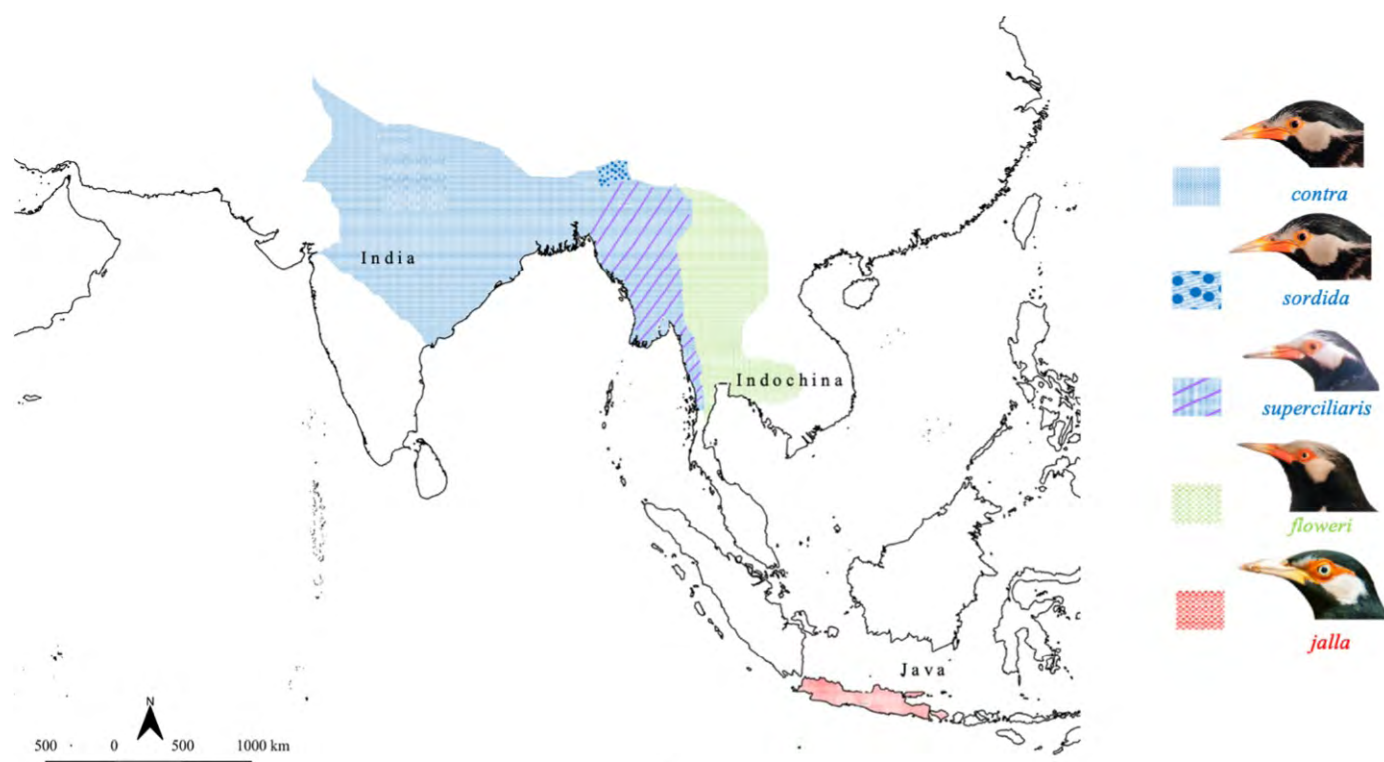


Formerly grouped as a subspecies of Asian Pied Starlings (*Gracupica contra*) species complex, the *jalla* taxon of starlings from Java and Bali has been elevated to the species status of Javan Pied Starling (*Gracupica jalla*) by BirdLife International due to its morphological differences and geographical separation from other subspecies in South and Southeast Asia (see figure on the next page). Earlier widespread across Java and Bali, *jalla* is now extinct in the wild, owing primarily to the extensive illegal songbird trade in Indonesia. To compensate for the extinction in the wild, bird breeders strive to meet the increasing market demand of the *jalla* songbirds by hybridising them with other closely related starlings from Thailand (*floweri*) and Myanmar (*superciliaris*).

In order to conduct any viable genomic investigation into the taxonomy of the starlings, the researchers need access to pure (non-hybridised) samples of the *jalla*, which is implausible owing to their extinction and hybridisation in the market. This scenario is redeemed only by utilising the pure samples stored in museums. Natural history museums are a treasure trove of untapped resources with a huge potential for future studies. Current advances in genomic technology allows extraction of DNA from the museum samples where the extracted DNA might be degraded. However, despite the potential degradation, advanced bioinformatic pipelines allow reliable extraction of information from the DNA.

By obtaining museum samples for *jalla* and closely related starling taxa, we conducted a [genomic study](#) that could discern that the Asian Pied Starling species complex actually consists of three different taxa at the species level: the Indian Pied Starling (Indian subcontinent and Myanmar), Thai Pied Starling (Thailand and Cambodia) and Javan Pied Starling (historically in Java and Bali); the last is currently at the brink of extinction. The genomic research clarified that Javan Pied Starling deserves a species status and consequently directed conservation action. Our research also identified some of the present-day samples which are pure, and hence, are potential candidates for conservation breeding purposes.

Besides prescribing conservation of Javan Pied Starling, which in fact, is among the top ten endangered taxa identified by the ASTSG, our study also firmly establishes the feasibility and viability of using museum samples as a proxy for unattainable pure samples from the wild. In conclusion, we strongly suggest future research to consider the potential of using museum samples, especially given the status quo in bird demographics, where an increasing number of species are getting endangered due to hybridisation.



Distribution ranges of five taxa of Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) species complex: nominate *contra*, *sordida*, *superciliaris*, *floweri* and *jalla*

Photos of *contra* and *sordida* by Mustafa Sozen, *superciliaris* by Thomas Brooks, *floweri* by Peter Ericsson, *jalla* by Boas Emmanuel

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



photo by VBN / Nature in Stock
Kebun Baru Birdsinging Club, Singapore

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SONGBIRD CONSERVATION

INTERVIEW WITH ANUJ JAIN^{1,2}

¹ [BirdLife International \(Asia\)](#)

² Vice-chair of Education and Community Engagement sub-group, ASTSG

Why is community engagement important in addressing the Asian songbird trade?

Anuj: It is common knowledge that the Asian songbird keeping and trade has strong cultural roots with different Asian countries having distinct preferences for certain kinds of pet birds, songs, cages and accessories. For example, keeping songbirds in handmade bamboo cages is a centuries old tradition in China. Indonesian songbird keeping hobby and partake in competitions, though now highly prevalent across Java, are believed to have gained popularity during the Dutch rule. So perhaps it is not as old as it is thought to be. In Singapore, we witness a blend of Indo-Chinese and Javanese songbird keeping styles. Bird keeping preferences may vary but

the drivers are largely socio-economic. The big challenge is that the majority of songbirds kept as pets are wild-caught. Complex supply chains have emerged involving often marginalised communities that trap and supply wild birds for small amounts of money to middle men that eventually sell to bigger markets. With numerous people's livelihoods involved in the trade, it is important to tackle the issue in a culturally sensitive manner.

What is the main raising awareness / community engagement strategy of BirdLife International?

Anuj: BirdLife International is a partnership of national conservation NGOs. Lately, we have embarked on a new project with our country partner - [Burung Indonesia](#) - to better understand the origin of the birds in songbird trade and linkages to the markets including the trappers, traders, breeders and users. We want to build on the studies carried out at songbird markets and users to deeply understand the people involved in the supply chain. Eventually, we want to develop natural resource management agreements and sustainable livelihood alternatives for select communities impacted by trade across key sites in Java. We also want to increase dialogue among stakeholders to lay the foundation for



photo by Sofiya Shukhova

regulatory change from the keep of wild-caught to captive-bred birds at the city/district/national level. Our recent work in Singapore with colleagues from the National University of Singapore and Mandai Nature has shown that songbird keeping is (unsurprisingly) highly influenced by the community i.e. friends, family and influencers of bird keepers. Therefore, awareness raising must engage the entire community of songbird keepers and particularly the influencers.

What are the benefits of being a member of ASTSG? Do you believe that ASTSG as a group can help you to engage a wider audience and spread your message?

Anuj: Membership to the ASTSG Community Engagement sub-group offers an opportunity for interested individuals to share and learn experiences about different aspects of community engagement as they pertain to songbird keeping and trade. Fundamentally, community engagement approaches are universal and based on human psychology and values, yet they ought to be context dependent and therefore, different. As a sub-group, we hope to develop a collective knowledge base of best practices for ASTSG members on how to educate bird keepers about the environmental impacts of keeping wild-caught songbirds and encourage them to shift to captive-bred songbirds, how to convince breeders and competition organisers to encourage to keep only captive-bred birds. Eventually, how to expedite the implementation of sustainable livelihood approaches for communities dependent on songbird trade.

How can your experience help other ASTSG's members to tackle the Asian songbird crisis?

Anuj: As the Vice-Chair of the ASTSG Education and Community Engagement sub-group, I feel my biggest task is to effectively engage the ASTSG member community to advance community-based conservation. My role at BirdLife as the Asia Bird Trade Coordinator is regional and also involves liaising with partners across South and Southeast Asia to develop and coordinate bird trade projects. In these reinforcing roles (BirdLife and ASTSG), I have witnessed that listening to and working with communities on-ground really pays off. To enable bottom-up learning, the Community Engagement sub-group has started a series of webinars (two completed so far and more to come) for members to share their work with ASTSG members. Working with other interested ASTSG members, we take these context specific sharings, distil the lessons learned to a regional level on how to engage communities involved in the songbird trade in a collective, coordinated and effective manner.



photo by Burung Indonesia

Stakeholder discussions among key breeder associations and influencers on songbird trade with USAID BIJAK team member and Burung Indonesia

FOLLOWING THE SONGBIRD SUPPLY CHAIN: FROM MARKET SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS TO COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS IN INDONESIA

Written by Anuj Jain,^{1,2} Vincentia Widyasari³ & Karlina Indraswari^{4,5,6,7}

¹ [BirdLife International \(Asia\)](#)

² Vice-chair of Education and Community Engagement sub-group, ASTSG

³ [Burung Indonesia](#)

⁴ [QUT Business School](#)

⁵ [Resilient Conservation](#)

⁶ [Indonesia Wildlife Connection](#)

⁷ Member of Education and Community Engagement sub-group, ASTSG

The popularity of songbirds as cage birds in Java is well established. Go on for a walk on Jakarta's neighborhoods and you are likely to hear melodious songs of birds in cages. Visit bird markets at major Javanese cities and you can find and even count the numbers of birds being offered on sale (although this is easier said than done). Efforts in recording species sold in markets and the prices they are sold for can provide a reasonable proxy of the bird's supply and demand. Conservationists have

done exactly that over the years. We have a pretty good knowledge of the extent and species that are prevalent in songbird markets in Java (e.g., see studies by [Chng et al.](#), [Nijman et al.](#)). Songbird owners are likely to openly share their passion for birds and the kinds of birds they keep, allowing researchers to understand more on the kinds and numbers of birds' people keep and why (e.g., see articles by [Jepson and Ladle](#), [Marshall et al.](#)). The songbird competition

activities add another layer to the songbird trade, where competitions give space to growth of community, pride, talent and price moneys. All have concluded that songbird trade is big business. Unfortunately, songbirds in this trade are often caught illegally from the wild. Commendably, enforcement action from the government authorities in cooperation with NGOs seems to be increasing. For example, in 2019 local enforcement agencies [confiscated over 41,000 birds](#) from the illegal trade in Sumatra, Indonesia.

Research in this field continues to grow. Studies have shown that it is possible to characterise Indonesia's wild bird trade network from [media-reported seizure incidents](#). Other studies have [profiled songbird consumer](#) types in Java i.e. hobbyists, contestants and breeders and shown that their behaviours and profiles are dynamic and switching between consumer types is not uncommon.

On the other end of the spectrum, studies continue to link bird [market observations with the declining population trends](#) of wild songbirds. Efforts to fill in the information gap however have increased. Lately, citizen scientists have been engaged across Java and Bali to [count birds on a large scale](#), helping to fill in knowledge gaps in Java and Bali's bird status and distribution.

What's next? It is heartening to see that several new and much needed initiatives have been initiated that we briefly summarise.

Recently, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia in cooperation with USAID BIJAK conducted a workshop to discuss and develop ideas towards sustainable songbird keeping among different

stakeholders including hobbyists, breeders and conservationists. In-depth interviews were conducted with songbird key actors across four West Java cities, forming the basis of a behaviour change campaign to move from wild-caught to captive-bred birds. Results are underway.

[Burung Indonesia](#) and [BirdLife](#) have embarked on a new project to establish linkages between songbird markets and downstream stakeholders in the supply chain i.e. associated trappers, traders and breeders. Working with downstream communities will help us develop sustainable livelihood alternatives. Participatory forest monitoring and protection has been initiated by Burung Indonesia as part of the village resources management agreement in Bandung regency, Java. This is to ensure a safe habitat for songbirds with the support of the local villagers. Discussions are also underway for Cikananga Conservation Breeding Centre ([CCBC](#)) to work with local government authorities and NGO PAPSI to engage communities in re-introducing and protecting the Javan Pied Starlings (*Gracupica jalla*) in West Java.



photo by Adnan / Burung Indonesia

Community forest monitoring and protection for songbirds has been initiated as part of the village resources management agreement in Java

These developments are crucial for the provision of sustainable livelihood alternatives for communities dependent on songbird trade. Equally, the adoption of behaviour change campaigns has to advance to bring about regulatory change from the keep of wild to captive-bred birds in Indonesia. This can only be good for songbirds and people.

The authors would like to acknowledge USAID BIJAK team members for sharing information on their songbird project and CCBC for sharing information on planned work on Javan Pied Starlings and other songbirds.



photo by Yayasan Cikananga Konservasi Terpadu
Social survey conducted by CCBC & PAPS team to engage the community in protecting songbirds and hornbills in west Java

TRIGGERING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN SONGBIRD COMPETITIONS THROUGH THE WAK GATAK CONSERVATION CENTER

Written by Novia Sagita^{1,2}

¹ [Planet Indonesia](#)

² Vice-chair of Education and Community Engagement sub-group, ASTSG

Planet Indonesia organisation is an award-winning international non-profit that conserves at-risk ecosystems through village-led partnerships. We utilise a right-based approach to engage locally-led solutions to unlock the potential for Indigenous and rural communities to restore and retain balance within human-nature interdependence. Our organisation's evidence-based model is driven by listening, responding, and adapting to the opportunities and challenges faced by communities in Indonesia. From there, our on-site interventions are co-designed through community partnerships and built upon the values, needs, and aspirations of communities that partner with us to address issues at the social-ecological nexus. We recognise the need for far-sighted solutions that transcend boundaries of mainstream initiatives that often sideline communities in environmental conservation, by acknowledging that the future requires a shift towards inclusive systems-based approaches.

The role of the Wak Gatak conservation division at Yayasan Planet Indonesia

While Yayasan Planet Indonesia's (YPI) programmes are dedicated to addressing the in-situ drivers of biodiversity loss, we also work to tackle the symptoms of illegal wildlife trade through ex-situ programmes led by our [Wak Gatak](#) branch, which is the ex-situ

conservation division of YPI. Wak Gatak's main goal is to work to reverse the negative impacts of environmental crime on biodiversity and society. Our ex-situ vision is delivered through four main programmes:

- Law Enforcement and Judiciary Support – providing intelligence, improving capacity, and combatting corruption of industries and crime rings that exploit nature and human rights;
- Songbird Rescue, Rehabilitation, Release – Indonesia's first songbird rescue centre;
- Behaviour Change Campaigns – focusing on behaviour change campaigns using cutting-edge tool to reduce demand for wildlife – with a focus on songbirds;
- Trade Research and Advocacy – conducting research to uncover supply chains, map convergence point, and use data to advocate for policy reform and improved implementation.

While the Wak Gatak Conservation Center that includes the first songbird rescue and rehabilitation centre in Kalimantan scheduled to start operations in 2021 is in the final stages of construction, our ex-situ teams have been carrying out various activities under the four programmes described above. These activities are being carried out in

close cooperation with multiple government agencies that include West Kalimantan's BKSDA (Natural Resources Conservation Office), Gakkum (Law Enforcers), SPORC (Fast Response Forestry Police Unit), police, quarantine office, customs and others.

Our ex-situ activities are carried out in a way that maximises the synergies between our different programmes based on our ex-situ Theory of Change. Recently, we started to implement activities focused on reducing the demand and use for wild-caught songbirds in songbird competitions. As part of this

behaviour change programme, we partnered with Universitas Nasional, Jakarta and West Kalimantan's BKSDA to conduct a survey of songbird competition contestants in West Kalimantan. This survey will help us to better understand the characteristics and motivations of songbird competition contestants to join such competitions. As the results of this survey will enable us to profile people who join such competitions, we can to design targeted messaging campaigns using an educational approach that creates greater awareness about songbird protection in Indonesia.



photo by Anang Aditiya / Planet Indonesia

Wak Gatak Conservation Center, the first songbird rescue and rehabilitation centre in Kalimantan

The survey results

Characteristics and Profiles

This survey was carried out in two locations in West Kalimantan - Pontianak City and Kubu Raya District, to understand the general characteristics (e.g. religion, ethnicity, age, occupation, income, etc.), attitude and motivations of contestants who participate in songbird competitions. In total 149 contestants participated in this survey.

Survey results reveal that the majority of songbird competition contestants are of the Muslim faith (92.6%), followed by Buddhists (7%), and Christians (0.4%). In case of ethnicity, most contestants were Malay (36.2%) followed by other local Indonesian ethnicities. In general, more than 80% of the people who participate in songbird competitions in the study locations are between 21 and 40 years old. Most people who participate in songbird competitions are trained in handling birds and participate professionally in competitions. In case of occupation, more than two-thirds of contestants (74.5%) are private employees,

14.7 % are entrepreneurs, while the rest (10.8%) have other occupations. Results also show that contestants who regularly participate in songbird competitions earn an income below IDR 7 million per month.

In case of preference between wild-caught or captive-bred songbirds, most contestants preferred to use wild songbirds in competitions rather than captive-bred ones as they felt that wild songbirds are more agile, stronger and aggressive in competitions. Most respondents also reported that they kept songbirds simply as a hobby and are willing to pay a high price to buy songbirds that already have good vocalisations and song quality.

Motivations/Perceptions

In order to understand motivations for participating in songbird competitions, survey participants were asked to respond to a number of statements using a Likert scale. The following results reveal that, in general, there were some conflicting statements.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Songbird trade does not contribute to population decline	30%	31%	16%	22%	0%
Songbird competitions do not contribute to population decline	30%	57%	6%	6%	0%
Involvement in songbird competitions only using domestic species is better than using native wild-caught species	11%	52%	27%	10%	0%
I should avoid competing with protected species	35%	52%	12%	1%	0%
Many songbird species are going extinct	24%	48%	24%	4%	0%
Songbird competitions do contribute to songbird extinctions	24%	28%	17%	31%	0%



photo by Anang Aditiya / Planet Indonesia

Songbird competition in Pontianak

The majority of the survey participants reported that songbird trade (61%) and songbird competitions (87%) do not contribute to wild songbird population declines. Alternatively, 72% of survey participants reported that many songbird species are going extinct, and 52% of survey participants felt that songbird competitions contribute to such extinctions. This provides preliminary evidence that songbird views of contestants greatly vary in their attitude towards the impact of songbird competitions on wild songbird populations.

As we are still analysing this large dataset to better understand the perceptions and profiles of songbird competition goers, early results still reveal interesting trends, conflicting view points, and a detachment from the idea that competitions and songbird keeping as a "hobby" contribute to species extinction.

CONSERVATION BREEDING AND REINTRODUCTION



photo by Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark
Aviaries at Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark



photo by Andrew Owen
Javan Green Magpies

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION BREEDING CENTRES IN SAVING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MOST THREATENED SONGBIRDS

Written by Andrew Owen^{1,2}

¹ [Chester Zoo](#)

² Vice-chair of Conservation Breeding and Reintroduction sub-group, ASTSG

Recovering Southeast Asia's most threatened songbirds involves a multi-disciplinary approach – from field surveys and genetic analyses to understanding and combatting illegal trade and working with local communities. In addition to these, one area that is integral to the survival of often tiny populations is conservation breeding. Without

conservation breeding programmes and the dedicated breeding centres to manage the birds, there would be no link to the wider longer-term recovery goals of the ASTSG.

Cikananga Conservation Breeding Centre ([CCBC](#)) located in the hilly countryside of West Java, was the first of its kind. As part

of Cikananga Wildlife Centre, who's aims are the rescue and care of confiscated Indonesian wildlife, CCBC was established in 2007 with a focus on breeding the most threatened species. The critically endangered Black-winged Myna (*Acridotheres melanopterus*), virtually extinct in the wild was the first species. Over subsequent years, breeding skills were perfected and over 500 myna's have been reared. Trial releases were carried out at several remote sites, which despite initial success including the first breeding of the species in the wild from captive-bred stock, these attempts ultimately succumbed to unrelenting trapping pressure. CCBC faced a major setback in 2014, when the centre was raided and 140 Black-winged Mynas were stolen, including the majority of their breeding birds.

Despite these challenges, the dedicated staff at CCBC have persevered and with the support of partners Chester Zoo, Mandai Nature and Wildlife Reserves Singapore, have established breeding programmes for the critically endangered Javan Green Magpie (*Cissa thalassina*), Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush (*Garrulax rufifrons*) including the Mount Slamet (*Garrulax rufifrons slametensis*) subspecies and the endangered Sumatran Laughingthrush (*Garrulax bicolor*). CCBC currently holds 45% of the entire global captive population of Javan Green Magpie.

The next steps for the Javan Green Magpie is a pilot project currently being developed by CCBC, Chester Zoo and Manchester Metropolitan University with funding from [EAZA Silent Forest campaign](#). This project team will engage with local forest communities and bird trappers to develop alternative livelihoods and create forest guardians to ensure safe havens where Javan Green Magpies and other

forest birds can thrive and where captive-bred birds may be reintroduced into the wild.

Taman Safari Indonesia ([TSI](#)) soon followed and set up songbird breeding facilities at their safari park on the outskirts of Bogor. TSI started working with the same species as CCBC and both institutions cooperate and include their birds in international and regional studbooks.

TSI engage with local communities around the park and have carried out a release programme for Black-winged Myna within the grounds of the zoo. The relative security of the park and support from zoo staff has allowed the birds to thrive and numerous successful breeding attempts have been made in artificial nest boxes and natural tree cavities.

This model of releasing songbirds into large, well-managed safe havens, such as zoological parks, botanical gardens and large city parks may be viable options for some of the more generalist species, such as mynas and starlings and the information gathered from such "managed" releases will prove invaluable for future releases into "wilder" habitats.

In 2017 TSI started to construct a purpose-built songbird breeding centre at their sister zoo in East Java called Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark ([PCBA](#)). Managed by a team of international and local zoologists and financially supported by a large number of EAZA institutions, PCBA has quickly established itself as the largest songbird conservation-breeding facility in Asia. As well as keeping and breeding the original four species, PCBA has brought in many other birds and currently holds 250 songbirds of 24 taxa in 121 purpose-built aviaries. Notable species are Sumatran Mesia (*Leiothrix laurinae*),

Javan White-eye (*Zosterops flavus*), Wangi-Wangi White-eye (*Zosterop ssp. nov.*), Maratua Shama (*Kittacincla malabaricus barbouri*/ *Copsychus barbouri*), Tenggara Hill Myna (*Gracula venerata*), Javan Crested Jay Shrike (*Platylophus galericulatus galericulatus*) and Javan Pied Starling (*Gracupica jalla*).

Other conservation-breeding activities underway are the establishment of a Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*) breeding population at Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. This highly-prized species has been lost from much of its former range due to trapping and Singapore holds the last viable wild populations.

Barusan Shamas (*Kittacincla malabaricus spp./ Copsychus melanurus*) are restricted to a cluster of small islands off the northwest coast of Sumatra and all are on the brink of extinction. The Simeulue Barusan Shama Breeding Programme was started in 2020 by [EcosystemImpact](#) and with support from Marlow Bird Park, Mandai Nature, Wildlife Reserves Singapore and EAZA. A breeding facility has been built at the Mahi-Mahi Surf Resort and 12 birds have been acquired from local bird keepers as founder stock for the programme.

Another songbird breeding centre will soon be under way at the [Orangutan Haven](#) near Medan in Sumatra again with funding from EAZA Silent Forest Campaign and support from Durrell. This centre will focus on breeding some of Sumatra's most imperilled songbirds.

Conservation breeding is an invaluable piece of the toolkit needed to conserve species for the long-term. The determination and dedication of a relatively small number of conservationists, species champions, breeding centres' staff and funders has shown that many of these species can be saved. Demographic and genetic management of these assurance populations buys precious time, while broader species recovery plans are put into action.



photo by Bertie Ferns

CCBC's head Keeper Ajleh

SIMEULUE BARUSAN SHAMA BREEDING PROGRAMME

Written by Tom Amey¹

¹ [EcosystemImpact Foundation](#)

Programme introduction

EcosystemImpact Foundation is a conservation organisation working to keep the wild landscapes of Bangkaru and Simeulue Islands, Aceh, Indonesia, wild through a sustainability approach where business, people and nature thrive alongside each other.

Simeulue Barusan Shama (*Kittacincla malabaricus hypoliza/Copsychus melanurus hypoliza*) and Babi Barusan Shama (*Kittacincla malabaricus opisthochrus/Copsychus melanurus opisthochrus*) are classed by the [ASTSG](#) and [EAZA Silent Forest Campaign](#) as being close to extinct in the wild – primary conservation target species of the ASTSG and EAZA Silent Forest Campaign – and in many locations already extinct. [Rheindt et al.](#) outline “the extinction-in-progress in the wild” of Barusan Shama across the region. Yet Barusan Shama is still unrecognised as a species by [BirdLife](#) or the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and is classed as White-rumped Shama (*Kittacincla malabaricus*). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species classifies White-rumped Shamans as Least Concern, meaning that Barusan Shamans do not get the international conservation awareness they require.

Through local collaboration and government support, EcosystemImpact has been able to procure some of the remaining captive individuals of Simeulue and Babi Shama and securely hold and breed them in purpose-built aviaries on Simeulue Island.

[IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group](#)



photo by EcosystemImpact Foundation

Barusan Shama egg

Bird procurement and nesting success

EcosystemImpact has been able to procure 12 individuals – six male and six female – of which eight have been paired and four remain in separate aviaries. Within the aviaries with paired birds, pine needles, leaves and coconut husks have been provided as nesting material. Of the four pairs, two have successfully made nests. After 13 days of incubation, the first egg laid hatched into the first successful chick of the Simeulue Barusan Shama Breeding Programme.

As a conservation breeding programme, where possible EcosystemImpact will aim for parent raising of the chicks. Since the chick hatched

on 24 May 2021, calci worms or black soldier fly larvae and mealworms have been provided to the parents at hourly intervals. Only recently shed mealworms with soft white bodies have been provided. Regular and large amounts of food have been supplied so that the parents have enough to feeding both themselves and the chick. Both the male and female parent have been busily feeding the chick by collecting up to five calci and mealworms in their beaks at one time and feeding them to the chick.

At just over a week, the chick doubled in size, had its eyes open, and was in the early phase of feather growth. With a small clutch size of one egg, future clutch size will be monitored as a point of interest, as it may be possible that different island Shama forms have smaller clutches sizes.

Programme Development

EcosystemImpact is currently developing a community ranger programme to secure a site for the future release of birds from the programme. However, as Barusan Shama are notoriously difficult to identify, a crucial component of achieving this is to determine the exact origin of each individual through DNA analyses.

In order to begin developing a biobank of Asian songbirds, members of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine from Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, will carry out sampling of the birds from the breeding programme. These samples will then likely be transported to a research facility with the capability to analyses the DNA to test the origin of each individual.

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photo by EcosystemImpact Foundation

The male Barusan Shama with mealworm ready to be fed to the chick



photo by Rodiansyah / Planet Indonesia

Thank you for reading our newsletter!

More information can be found on our website: <https://www.asiansongbirdtradesg.com/>

For enquiries, please email us at asiansongbirdtradesg@gmail.com

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