

BLUE-FRONTED LORIKEET

Charmosyna toxopei



Critical ■ C2b

Endangered □ D1

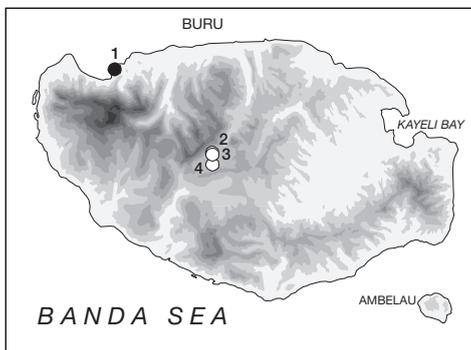
Vulnerable □ —

This species has not been positively identified for many years despite several surveys of Buru, suggesting that its population is very small, and likely to be decreasing given that its habitat is shrinking in extent and quality. It thus meets the criteria for Critical.

DISTRIBUTION This small lory is known only from the island of Buru in the South Moluccas, Indonesia. Records are from:

■ **INDONESIA** *Buru Bara* (Teluk Bara), some time in the period 1979–1981 (November 1980: see Remarks 1) (Smiet 1985, locality determined in Jepson 1993), with four birds judged but not confirmed as this species in December 1989 (Jepson 1993), or, in another account, two flocks of six and five birds, 600 m, December 1989 (Marsden *et al.* 1997); **Wa Temun**, 840 m, February 1922 (Siebers 1930); **Wa Fehat**, 850 m, February 1922 (Siebers 1930); **Nal Besi** (type locality), 1,000 m, June 1921 (Siebers 1930), i.e. on the west side of Danau Rana, where not found in 1989 (Jepson 1993), but for a probable record in 1998 see Threats.

According to L. J. Toxopeus, the first explorer to encounter the species and the only one to collect specimens, the Blue-fronted Lorikeet might well have a very limited range, possibly only on the west banks of the Rana plateau, since a local name for it, “utu papua”, is unknown to natives elsewhere on the island (Siebers 1930). Toxpeus had a possible record from Leksula, 1921 or 1922 (Siebers 1930) which is best treated as provisional (see Remarks 2). In the 1990s local people were interviewed about the species, and only those living on the west bank of the Rana river knew it, having a local name, “utu papua”, and describing its feeding on nectar and pollen from flowering trees, and reporting that it is commonest in the mountains between their villages and Danau Rana, not far from the area Toxopeus described; elsewhere neither the bird nor the name was recognised (MKP, Y. Persulesy verbally 2000). Villagers at Waieka reported that the birds often come to flowers of “hanimura” trees in low hills around the village, although two days’ intensive searching there produced no records (MKP). Marsden *et al.* (1997) also reported hearing a *Charmosyna* lorikeet at Wafawel.



The distribution of Blue-fronted Lorikeet

Charmosyna toxopei: (1) Bara; (2) Wa Temun; (3) Wa Fehat; (4) Nal Besi.

○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Recent (1980–present)

POPULATION The status of this species is puzzling. Jepson (1993) commented as follows: “The fact that only one out of the 24 collectors active on Buru recorded *C. toxopei* suggests that it is either very rare, nomadic or has specific habitat preferences. Smiet (pers. comm.) recorded the species in disturbed lowland forest between the band of coastal agriculture and the base of the hills... Little forest remained [in 1989] in this lowland belt, which is now dominated by grassland [see Remarks 3]. If this species is confined to lowland forest on Buru, it could be seriously threatened. Further surveys are urgently required and it is recommended that future surveys cover as much of the ground below 500 m as possible, and that the areas around Danau Rana and Teluk Bara are taken as starting points” (see Measures taken). Smiet (1985) reported finding the species “quite common” in various habitats on Buru, occasionally in pairs but more often in small groups of up to 10 birds; this finding was checked with him by Jepson (1993) and found particularly to refer to the area of Teluk Bara. As the observations at Teluk Bara reported by Marsden *et al.* (1997) were in selectively logged forest it was thought that the species “may not be rare”.

ECOLOGY Habitat The 1921–1922 records were of birds limed in flowering trees in apparently level land west of Lake Rana, 840–1,000 m, with one aural (but discounted: see Remarks 2) record from a coconut plantation in the south at or near sea-level (Siebers 1930). Inside the period 1979–1981 the species was found in plantations, and secondary and primary forest (Smiet 1985). However, the incontrovertible specimen evidence and the reports of local people in the 1990s tend to indicate that the Blue-fronted Lorikeet is—or is now—a mid-altitude forest bird (MKP).

Food Birds feed on the nectar and pollen of certain flowering trees, one particular tree in which birds were captured being probably a member of the Myrtaceae (Siebers 1930). Captive birds survived on “bananas, milk and such like”, the bananas being licked or scraped with the tongue (Siebers 1930).

Breeding Of four birds with specific collection dates, two were adults in June and two were juveniles in February (Siebers 1930).

THREATS This bird is at risk from habitat loss. It has been suggested that this would be so if the species proves to be confined to lowland forest (Jepson 1993), but it is so anyway. Although in the mid-1990s nearly 75% of Buru still retained under some sort of forest cover (totally 6,250 km²), no fewer than 3,866 km²—62%, almost two-thirds—have been designated as conversion forest, in which natural growth in whatever condition will be replaced in due course with other land uses such as agriculture (Poulsen 1998). Of existing forest types, the most extensive are semi-evergreen forest, monsoon forest (in the north-east) and lowland rainforest (in the west); 80% of this last type has already been logged, but it is the prospect of its being totally cleared which probably poses the greatest threat today to biological diversity on Buru (Poulsen 1998). There is logging all along the south-western catchment of Danau Rana, with a new road to a shoreside village (F. R. Lambert verbally 1999).

All seven specimens in the original series were caught alive with lime (Siebers 1930). However, Smiet (1985) found that the species was not known as a pet and was apparently not traded; this appears to remain the case, although workers at a logging camp on the west side of Danau Rana reported that in 1998 someone had trapped a number of small green parrots with long tails in a flowering tree close to the camp (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999).

The Blue-fronted Lorikeet is one of (now) three threatened members of the suite of 10 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Buru Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

MEASURES TAKEN The species is listed on CITES Appendix II. The recommendations for surveys put forward by Jepson (1993; see Population) were duly carried out by BirdLife

International in 1995, resulting in the judgement that the species persists in the Danau Rana area and is unlikely to be confined to lowland forest (MKP).

MEASURES PROPOSED An area of 1,450 km² on Gunung Kepalat Mada was originally proposed as a reserve, extending from the highest point on Buru down the western side to sea-level, including the wettest and biologically richest forests (FAO 1981–1982). However, a revised and refined version of this proposal leaves out now-deforested areas and includes more land towards the east, embracing sites for each threatened species as identified in 1994; given (a) the plans to convert large areas of forest to other uses, and (b) the possible elevational movements of this species, it is vital that this reserve be established in the near future (Poulsen 1998). Meanwhile, further searches for the species are required, to be followed at once by ecological and life-history studies as soon as a population is discovered, coupled with appropriate conservation advocacy.

REMARKS (1) Jepson (1993) wrote: “During 1980 Smiet (1985) found the species to be ‘quite common, in plantations, secondary and primary forest’. The ensuing literature has been unable to reach clarity regarding F. Smiet’s observations. White & Bruce (1986) reported that Smiet only observed one individual, in November 1980, and Forshaw (1990) questioned Smiet’s identification, arguing that the habitat is more in keeping with that of Red-flanked Lorikeet *C. placentis* which he erroneously assumes occurs on Buru. Forshaw quoted van Bemmelen (1940) as his source for *C. placentis* occurring on Buru, but this author misquoted an earlier paper by Vorderman (1898a) who quotes a medical doctor who collected *placentis* on Amblan island near Buru.” F. Smiet (*in litt.* 2000) has confirmed that in November 1980 he found the species “quite common along the entire north coast, especially in coastal gardens and plantations”. Nevertheless, the fact that he found it apparently so easily, when previous and subsequent fieldworkers have had such extreme difficulty with it, has inevitably raised some reluctant uncertainty over his records. (2) This record is based on a call (described by Toxopeus as a very shrill *ti-ti-ti-tititi*), but was discounted owing to a report that Red-flanked Lorikeet *C. placentis* might be feral in the island’s lowlands (Siebers 1930). Given that this appears never to have been the case (see Remarks 1) the Leksula record may well have been valid, but it is too uncertain to be accepted here (Island Starling *Aplonis mysolensis* has a call very similar to a *Chamosyna* lorikeet: MKP). (3) This passage implies loss of forest in the period 1980–1989, but it has been observed that grasslands as mapped by Toxopeus in 1920 (in Siebers 1930) have almost exactly the same distribution today (MKP).