

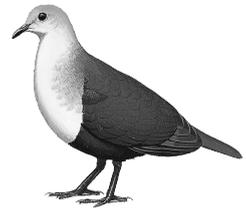
WETAR GROUND-DOVE

Gallicolumba hoedtii

Critical —

Endangered A1c,d; A2c,d

Vulnerable C1



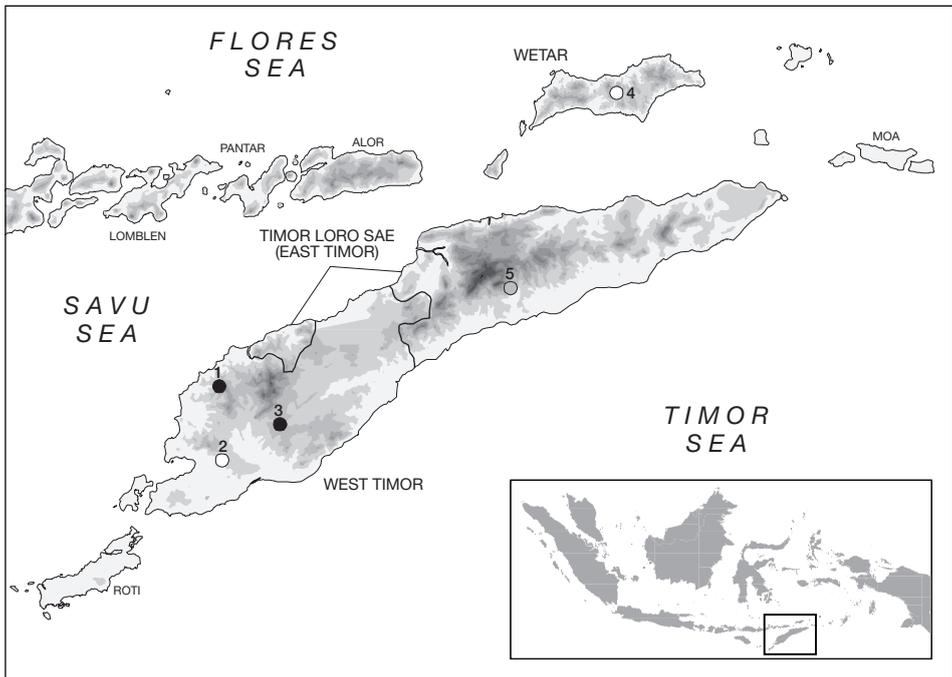
This species qualifies as Endangered because its population has suffered a very rapid decline (which might reasonably be expected to continue) as a result of severe lowland habitat loss and hunting. A healthy population may survive on Wetar, but this is not certain.

DISTRIBUTION The Wetar Ground-dove is known from West Timor and Wetar, Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, and Timor Loro Sae (East Timor). Records are from:

■ **INDONESIA** *West Timor* **Gunung Timau**, May 1999 (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000); **Camplong**, January 1932 (Mayr 1944); **Buat**, 5 km from Soe, 950 m, July 1993 (R. Noske *in litt.* 1999; also Noske 1995, Noske and Saleh 1996, Coates and Bishop 1997);

Wetar unspecified localities, May 1866 (two specimens in RMNH), April 1901 (two specimens in AMNH, BMNH), September–October 1902 (13 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, FMNH, USNM);

■ **TIMOR LORO SAE (East Timor)** *Same*, August 1972 (White and Bruce 1986).



The distribution of Wetar Ground-dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii*: (1) Gunung Timau; (2) Camplong; (3) Buat; (4) Wetar; (5) Same.

○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

POPULATION There are two subtly different interpretations of the species's status on Timor: one that it is undoubtedly rare but possibly overlooked (Noske and Saleh 1996), and one that it is apparently uncommon but almost certainly overlooked (Coates and Bishop 1997). Observers in the 1980s, failing to find the species at Camplong, tended to support the former view (Collar and Andrew 1988). On Wetar its status is unknown; the judgement that it was "formerly... locally moderately common" (Coates and Bishop 1997) was based on the fact that among museum material is a series of eight birds (in AMNH) obtained in five days in the first half of October 1902 (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999), and extensive forest still remains on the island (see Threats).

ECOLOGY Habitat This species inhabits lowland and hill monsoon forest and woodland, to 950 m (Coates and Bishop 1997). On Timor records have been from "forest near a clearing" (White and Bruce 1986), "fairly undisturbed hill forest" (Coates and Bishop 1997), degraded forest (site of abandoned village inside primary forest) at 600 m, and moist semi-deciduous forest at 900 m (D. Lesmana verbally 2000).

Food A bird was seen eating the seeds of damar merah *Macaranga* in a tree (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000). Like other ground-doves, however, this species must also forage on the ground, taking seeds and small invertebrates.

Breeding A male from Camplong, Timor, January, was immature (Mayr 1944).

Migration This species inhabits a strongly seasonal forest habitat, but it is not known to make any short-distance movements in consequence.

THREATS Habitat destruction on Timor has been extensive. It has been asserted that tropical monsoon forest, judged the original forest habitat on the island, now occupies less than 4% of the vegetative cover of West Timor and is distributed among seven or so remnant and isolated patches, the largest of which covers only 90 km², none of which is protected, and almost all of which is subject to grazing pressure of sufficient intensity as to be likely to impede regeneration (Noske and Saleh 1996). Grazing and burning are probably having a serious effect on the habitat of a terrestrial species such as this (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999).

In Timor Loro Sae (East Timor) there is little information on the current state of forests. As long ago as 1932 the last major collecting visit had anticipated important discoveries in "the previously unexplored high mountains of eastern Timor", only to discover that "villages occur up to... 2300 meters, and the forests have, therefore, entirely disappeared from the mountains" (Mayr 1944). Although this report is at complete variance with the 37% forest cover reported for the early 1980s (see further), there are more recent reports that in the period 1975–1999 large areas of forest were burnt and chemically destroyed, 200,000 transmigrants were settled in the state, increasing unsustainable slash-and-burn farming, and forest cover apparently declined from 37% as mapped by RePPProT in the early 1980s to 15% in the mid-1990s—a decline of over 50% in under 15 years (*Down to Earth* 42 [1999]: 1–3). This evidence is supported by Ora (2000), who reported that "according to the Forestry Department [Kantor Wilayah Departemen Kehutanan] of the province of East Timor (1999), the forest potential of East Timor is now in a critical condition, with a forest area of 97,065 ha [970km²] (13.87%), scrub 202,305 ha (28.91%) and 'empty land' 400,452 ha (57.22%)" (translation: C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001).

On Wetar in the mid-1980s natural vegetation continued to cover over 90% of the island, with 15% eucalypt woodland, 35% evergreen gallery forest, 25% evergreen monsoon forest and 25% deciduous monsoon forest (Kinhill Engineers Ltd report dated 1988 seen by C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001). Since then it has been reported that extensive forest still remains, extending in many places from sea-level up steep slopes into the hills, appearing as a patchwork of good-looking savanna woodlands with intrusions of semi-evergreen monsoon forest along

streams and gullies (K. D. Bishop in Collar *et al.* 1994 and *in litt.* 2000), but that logging of the larger, more valuable timber trees has commenced using chainsaws, and in 1990 several travois of freshly cut planks were seen from a ship being dragged from the forest (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000). Moreover, although (and doubtless because) the island has a very low human population (under 7,000 in the late 1990s, equivalent to 2.5 persons per km²), it is the target of plans to relocate refugees from East Timor (at one stage c.1,000 families or c.4,000 people), although these were stopped in January 2001 following objections from the NGO Forest Watch and the United Nations Jakarta Office (C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001).

Noske (1995) mentioned that pigeons are apparently hunted extensively in Timor but that, while this may be used to explain the rarity or decline of some species, there are others which, despite their size, remain “reasonably common”. This does not appear to be one of the latter type.

The Wetar Ground-dove is one of five (but note composition now different) threatened members of the suite of 23 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Timor and Wetar Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known specifically for this species. Gunung Timau has the status of protection forest (150 km²) (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2001). The stop placed on plans to relocate refugees to Wetar (see Threats) appears to have been taken at least in part on environmental grounds, given that a forest NGO was involved.

MEASURES PROPOSED Timor is home to five other threatened bird species, Slaty Cuckoo-dove *Turacoena modesta*, Timor Imperial-pigeon *Ducula cineracea*, Timor Green-pigeon *Treron psittacea*, Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* and Timor Sparrow *Padda fuscata*, plus nine Near Threatened species, Pink-headed Imperial-pigeon *Ducula rosacea*, Iris Lorikeet *Psittuteuteles iris*, Olive-shouldered Parrot *Aprosmictus jonquillaceus*, Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher *Todiramphus australasia*, Chestnut-backed Thrush *Zoothera dohertyi*, Orange-banded Thrush *Z. peronii*, White-bellied Bushchat *Saxicola gutturalis*, Black-banded Flycatcher *Ficedula timorensis* and Spot-breasted White-eye *Heleia muelleri*. Clearly it is time that a thorough survey of the forested regions of Timor was carried out, and the status of this species in particular, and also that of several other endemics (particularly those listed above), was re-assessed, so that effective measures for their conservation can be developed and implemented. The RePPPProT (1990) forest cover map of Timor shows an extensive patch due north of Gunung Mutis (West Timor) connecting with another fairly large patch further north; a long block along the south coast (West Timor); and an extensive area from the West Timor eastwards for two thirds of the country (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000). All such areas require careful investigation for their condition, content and long-term viability. This is equally true of Wetar, which has never been properly surveyed and assessed for birds and biodiversity, although it hosts two other threatened species, namely Slaty Cuckoo-dove and Timor Imperial-pigeon, and nine Near Threatened species, namely Pink-headed Imperial-pigeon, Iris Lorikeet, Olive-shouldered Parrot, Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher, Chestnut-backed Thrush, Orange-banded Thrush, Black-chested Honeyeater *Lichmera notabilis*, Crimson-hooded Myzomela *Myzomela kuehni*, Wetar Figbird *Sphecotheres hypoleucus* (these last three being Wetar endemics).

The fact that most remaining patches of lowland forest in West Timor protect watersheds (N. Bostock *in litt.* 1999) offers some opportunity for a strategy that locks biodiversity interests into water conservation measures on the island. There is a WWF initiative to extend the nature reserve on Gunung Mutis to encompass Gunung Timau (which itself was proposed as a wildlife sanctuary by FAO 1981–1982), and to designate the resulting entity as a national park (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2001); since fieldwork in 1999 showed that Timau possesses 29 of

Timor's 31 restricted-range bird species—by including species shared with other Endemic Bird Areas (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998)—this enterprise deserves strong support.

On Wetar, an area of 450 km² in the west of the island, including Gunung Arnau (1,550 m), is proposed as a reserve (Jepson 1996, Petocz and Jepson 1997), although it needs to be confirmed that this site is fully appropriate for the conservation of all threatened and Near Threatened landbirds on the island. According to Petocz and Jepson (1997), the justification for this reserve is that it will (a) establish a major ecosystem reserve in the Wetar bio-unit with representation of a full spectrum of habitats in accordance with principles of national protected area network planning; (b) conserve a large intact area of tropical monsoon forest in Indonesia (an internationally threatened habitat type and one identified as a global priority for conservation action: WCMC 1996), including one of the last remaining examples of tropical montane forest in Indonesia; (c) conserve the habitats of three unique bird species and other endemic fauna; and (d) protect a major watershed.

The National Conservation Plan proposed eight reserves in what was in 1982 Indonesian-controlled East Timor, largely to try to preserve some of the remaining natural forests in a fire-disturbed landscape (FAO 1981–1982). Of the eight proposals the most significant and representative of remaining habitats are probably Danau Ira Lalora-Pulau Yaco, Tilomor and Gunung Talamailu: Danua Ira Lalora (250 km²) includes a wild area of moist deciduous lowland forest and some mixed evergreen forest on the hills (FAO 1981–1982), and Danau (Lake Ira) Lalora itself, at 22 km², is the largest freshwater wetland area in the entire Lesser Sundas and probably of high biological value (C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001). In the south-west, on the south coast, Tilomor Wildlife Reserve (128 km²) possesses open deciduous savanna forests (the best example of such forest left in the country: Ora 2000) from sea-level to 1,000 m and, in addition to endemic birds, there are crocodiles in the Tafora river (RePPPProT 1989). Gunung Talamailu proposed wildlife reserve (200 km²) lies in the middle of the island (the highest mountain on Timor at 2,972 m) and retains extensive forest cover and the fullest representation of montane fauna on the island, including several endemic species (RePPPProT 1989).