BLUE-HEADED RACQUET-TAIL

Prioniturus platenae

Critical □ —
Endangered □ —
Vulnerable ■ A1c,d; A2c,d; C1

A combination of extensive lowland deforestation and exploitation for the cagebird trade have resulted in this species's rapid population reduction, which qualifies it as Vulnerable. It is predicted that these factors will continue to cause rapid declines in the near future.

DISTRIBUTION The Blue-headed Racquet-tail is endemic to the Philippines on Palawan and adjacent islands—Calauit, Busuanga, Culion, Linapacan and Dumaran to the north, Rasa and Balabac to the south. Records (north to south) are as follows:

■ ***PHILIPPINES*** *Calauit* at an unspecified locality (Agaloos and Nepomuceno 1977) and various localities, 1989–1993 (Pedregosa *et al*. 1995, NADM, J. C. T. Gonzalez *in litt*. 1996, A. C. Diesmos verbally 1997);

Busuanga **Salvacion** at Lubao, February 1975 (22 specimens in PNM); 6 km north of **San Nicolas**, May 1962 (specimen in USNM); **Boco-boco**, Coron, June 1963 (seven specimens in PNM); **Papaya**, Coron, June 1963 (male in PNM); Dimaniang (untraced), March 1947 (five specimens in FMNH, PNM); up to 14 specimens from no specified locality, at least one dated January 1893 (in CM, FMNH, USNM, ZMB; also McGregor 1909–1910);

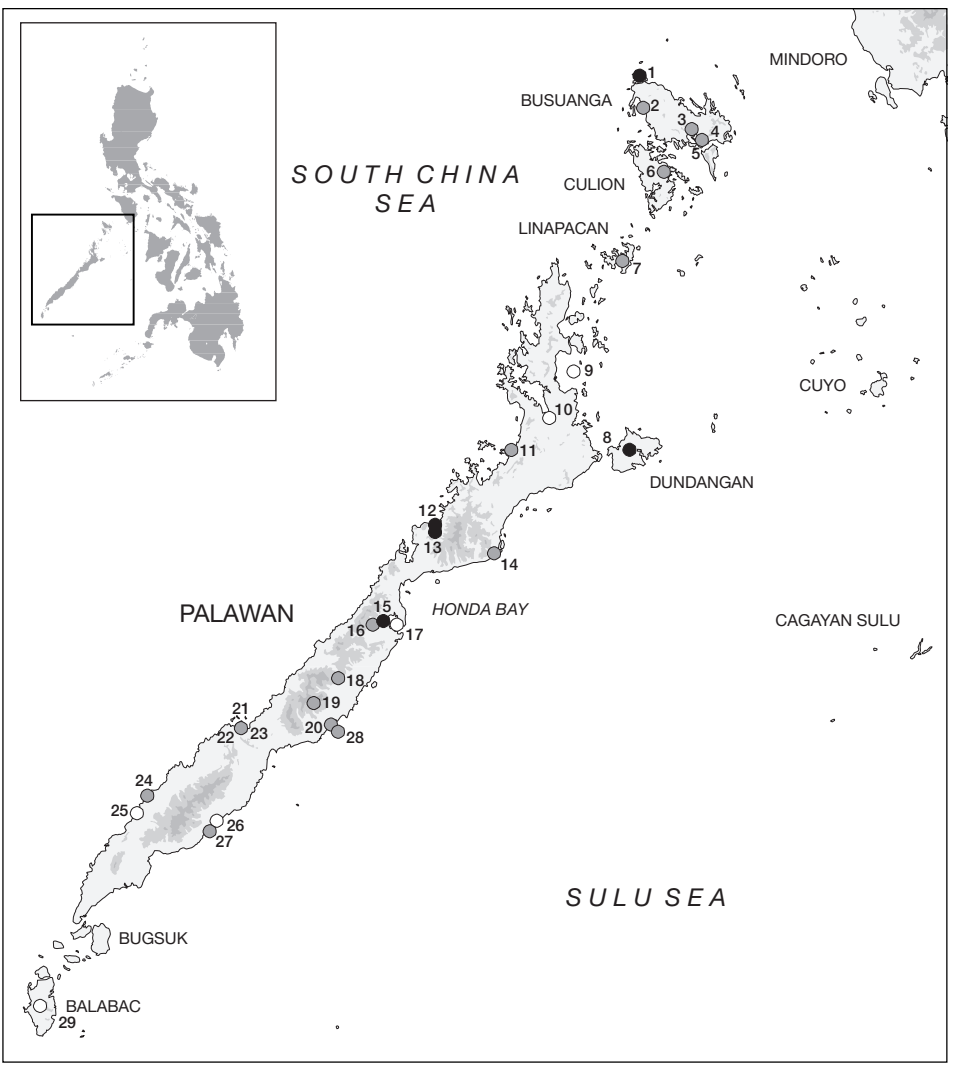
Culion **San Pedro**, March 1947 (two males in FMNH, PNM) and December 1975 (seven specimens in PNM); Igay (untraced), March 1975 (four specimens in PNM); four specimens from no specified locality, February 1892, February 1893, and December 1901 (in CM, FMNH, USNM), with an observation of a flock in 1995 (J. C. T. Gonzalez *in litt*. 1996); Coring (untraced), March 1975 (two specimens in PNM); Sindonan (untraced), November 1976 (five specimens in PNM);

Linapacan Caseledan (untraced), March and April 1975 (two males in PNM); **Kinalaykayan**, March 1975 (male in PNM);

Dumaran at unspecified localities, August 1921 (Dickinson *et al.* 1991; male in MCZ) and 1994 (J. C. T. Gonzalez *in litt*. 1996);

Palawan **Taytay Bay**, August 1913 (two specimens in MCZ); **Malampaya river**, August 1921 (two males in MCZ); **Pagdanan**, October 1978 (Fisher mss); **Sabang**, Batas, Taytay, June 1980 (three males in PNM); **St Paul's Subterranean River National Park**, regularly in small numbers in recent years (Sargeant 1989, Greensmith 1990, C. R. Robson in *litt*. 1994, W. Simpson *in litt.* 1997, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1997, R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1997); **Malabusog**, Tinitian, Roxas, April 1962 (two specimens in FMNH, UPD); **Iwahig Penal Colony**, June and July 1907 (six specimens in BMNH), February 1927 (specimen in USNM), at 450 m, March 1961 (female in UPLB), including at the nearby Balsahan Trail, April 1983, January 1988, April 1990, February and March 1994 (Clarke 1983, Fisher mss, Sargeant 1989, Greensmith 1990, Hornbuckle 1994, Davidson ms) and Knapsan Road, May 1983, 10 birds (Clarke 1983) and February 1984 (Gibbs 1984); **Mt Stavely Range**, March 1967 (female in PNM); **Puerto Princesa**, September 1883, August and September 1887, December 1891, January 1892, December 1905 to January 1906, and August–October 1925 (17 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, CM, FMNH, MCZ, USNM, ZMB; plus McGregor 1906d, Baud 1978), including at Tarabanan ("Tarabananan"), Concepcion, 0–300 m, May 1962 (four males in UPLB, UPD, USNM) and March 1967 (male in AMNH); **Kabigaan**, Aborlan, May 1962, January 1963 and March 1967, plus an unspecified locality at Aborlan, May 1955 (17 specimens in AMNH,

PNM); **Mt Victoria** near Aborlan, February 1967 (female in PNM); **Panacan**, May 1950 (two males in PNM); **Alfonzo (XII)**, Quezon, May 1963 (male in PNM); **Bulo-bulo**, Quezon, May 1963 (male in PNM); **Lilimbagan**, Quezon, May 1963 (male in PNM); **Singnapan**, Ransang, Quezon, June 1978 (female in PNM); **Candauaga**, March 1916 (Zimmer 1918b); **Taguso**, July and August 1887 (Whitehead 1890; 11 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, ZMB); **Brooke's Point** in March–April 1916 (four specimens in AMNH; also Zimmer 1918b),



The distribution of Blue-headed Racquet-tail *Prioniturus platenae*: (1) Calauit; (2) Salvacion; (3) San Nicolas; (4) Boco-boco; (5) Papaya; (6) San Pedro; (7) Kinalaykayan; (8) Dumaran; (9) Taytay Bay; (10) Malampaya river; (11) Pagdanan; (12) Sabang; (13) St Paul's Subterranean River National Park; (14) Malabusog; (15) Iwahig Penal Colony; (16) Mt Stavely Range; (17) Puerto Princesa; (18) Kabigaan; (19) Mt Victoria; (20) Panacan; (21) Alfonzo (XII); (22) Bulo-bulo; (23) Lilimbagan; (24) Singnapan; (25) Candauaga; (26) Taguso; (27) Brooke's Point; (28) Rasa; (29) Balabac.

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

including Mantalingahan Range, 0–150 m, April 1962 (male in FMNH); Pinikpikan (untraced), 207 m, Singnapan, Ransang, June 1978 (Sison 1983);

Rasa off Aborlan (Palawan), March and May 1967 (four specimens in PNM);

Balabac at an unspecified locality, August 1874 (specimen in UMMZ), December 1893 (male in BMNH).

POPULATION At Taguso in 1887 this species was almost as common as the Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus luconensis* (which was described as "very common") (Whitehead 1890). The paucity of recent records of the Blue-headed Racquet-tail (only four localities, two of them unspecified, in the 1990s) suggests that it is now generally uncommon (Dickinson *et al.* 1991) and declining (N. Bostock *in litt.* 1994), although it is reported to be regularly recorded in St Paul's Subterranean River National Park (R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1997, C. R. Robson *in litt.* 1994); indeed, birds confiscated from trade are reportedly frequently released at St Paul's Subterranean River National Park (R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1994). Sison (1983) reported the species as less common than the Blue-naped Parrot in southern Palawan's Singnapan valley, but gave no indication of abundance of this latter and moreover stated confusingly of the former that "Singnapan is not frequented by this species". McClure (1974) had over 40 records from 1964 to 1970 (no localities mentioned) and considered it "common in brushlands".

ECOLOGY ***Habitat*** Very little is known of the ecology of the species, other than it being a resident of lowland forest and nearby cultivation (Dickinson *et al.* 1991); Lowe (1916) recorded that it was "generally seen along the edges of the forest". How much higher it ranges than the 300 m recorded under Distribution is not known. On islands north of Palawan it has been recorded in ultrabasic forest, bamboo scrublands and mangrove (J. C. T. Gonzalez *in litt*. 1996) and in natural grassland with scattered trees (NADM), a habitat also favoured by several flocks at Pagdananan on Palawan (Fisher mss).

Food Nuts of an unknown species were found in the stomach and crop respectively of two specimens from July and August (BMNH label data), and some birds were collected "whilst they were feeding on some fruit-bearing trees only a few feet from the ground" (Whitehead 1890). Fruits of *Antidesma* have been seen being taken on Calauit (J. C. T. Gonzalez *in litt*. 1996).

Breeding Information on breeding biology is lacking, save that birds labelled juvenile have been collected in January (two) and August, and a bird labelled immature in May (FMNH, USNM label data; also Baud 1978).

Migration It is not known whether this bird undertakes minor seasonal or elevational displacements.

THREATS The Blue-headed Racquet-tail is threatened by forest destruction and, particularly, trapping for the cagebird trade (Collar *et al.* 1994, R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1997, NADM) (see Threats under Palawan Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum*). The relative importance of these two threats is difficult to gauge, but both are evidently continuing, probably at different intensities in different parts of the islands. The release of birds following confiscation (see Measures Taken) may actually only serve to expose wild populations to diseases picked up during periods of confinement. Nearly all of Palawan's forests are leased to logging operations, and the commercial logging at Pagdanan, whose forests, as elsewhere, ought to be on a rotation of a minimum 45 years between cuts, was expected to be complete within 8–15 years of 1984 (Quinnell and Balmford 1986). There are plans to commence granite mining at Iwahig (McGowan and Garson 1995). A report that the islands of Busuanga, Culion and Balabac are now largely deforested (see Kemp 1995) is not entirely accurate: while Culion is severely and probably irreparably damaged, with a constant influx of settlers (Orig 1997),

Busuanga has suffered fairly badly but may retain 40% forest cover (NADM), and Balabac retains only a small amount of forest (see Population under Philippine Cockatoo).

MEASURES TAKEN There are no records of this species from within the El Nido reserve, Palawan's only protected area designated under NIPAP. Nevertheless, the species is accorded relatively good protection in the St Paul's Subterranean River National Park. The Iwahig Penal Colony is managed by the Bureau of Prisons and provides further protection (BRT), but see Threats. Further details of these sites and other relevant conservation action are in the equivalent section under Palawan Peacock-pheasant. Illegally trapped birds are apparently frequently released following confiscation (R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1997). The species is listed on Appendix II of CITES.

MEASURES PROPOSED Apart from the areas targeted for protection above, the species has been recorded in three "key sites" (San Vicente/Taytay/Roxas forests, Victoria/Anapalan ranges, Mt Mantalingahan; see Appendix) and these deserve formal designation and protection under the NIPAS process. The small population on Rasa island stands to benefit from the current initiative to establish a reserve there for the sake of the breeding population of Philippine Cockatoos *Cacatua haematuropygia* (see relevant account), and indeed many components of the campaign on behalf of the cockatoo on Palawan should result in increased security for the island's racquet-tail, which is one of the target species in the complete ornithological survey of Palawan that is now required (see equivalent section under Palawan Peacock-pheasant). This information should be used to identify priority sites for conservation of the specialist endemic birds of the island's forests (see equivalent section under Palawan Hornbill *Anthracoceros marchei*).

Further monitoring of trade is essential, and education programmes designed to improve awareness of the rarity of the species and the illegality of its trapping are also clearly needed. Captive breeding is unnecessary, although sensible programmes using confiscated stock are likely to be a better option than release of birds back into the wild. Thorough accounts should be kept of confiscated (and re-released) stock. Re-released birds should, where possible, be tagged and monitored to determine survival rates, ecological requirements, etc. Biological studies of wild birds to determine their feeding and breeding requirements, and hence their long-term management needs, are long overdue.