

NEGROS FRUIT-DOVE

Ptilinopus arcanus



Critical ■ D1

Endangered □ —

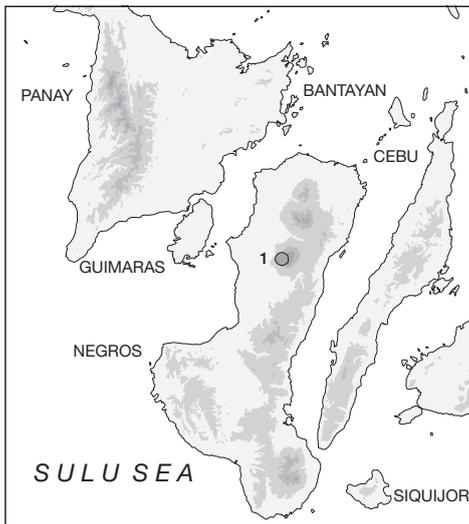
Vulnerable □ D2

This species is one of the least known birds in the world. It remains known only from the site where it was discovered in 1953 and, despite several recent protracted ornithological visits, it has not been recorded since. It is therefore inferred to have a tiny population, qualifying it as Critical.

DISTRIBUTION The Negros Fruit-dove is endemic to Negros in the Philippines, or at least only known from that island; but given the recent discovery on Panay of threatened species which, until 10 years ago, were known only from Negros and sometimes Guimaras (Negros Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba keayi*, Flame-templed Babbler *Dasyrotapha speciosa* and White-throated Jungle-flycatcher *Rhinomyias albigularis*) there is every reason to suppose that this mysterious fruit-dove may also prove to be present there.

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Negros* The species is known only from the female type collected along with a second bird, presumed its mate but whose body was lost in the undergrowth, on **Mt Canlaon** at Pula (Pulopantao), on 1 May 1953 (Ripley and Rabor 1955; specimen in YPM; see Remarks 1).

POPULATION The Negros Fruit-dove is the least known bird in the Philippines and one of the least known in the world. Its population is unknown, but given the failure of any investigator to encounter the species since its discovery in 1953, it must be an extremely rare bird. Brooks *et al.* (1992) and Evans *et al.* (1993a) reported that despite spending nine days at the type locality and a further 11 days at other sites in the same range of mountains, *P. arcanus* was not encountered. Similarly, a survey of Mt Canlaon in March 1994 was unsuccessful (P. L. Alviola verbally 1995).



The distribution of Negros Fruit-dove *Ptilinopus arcanus*: (1) Mt Canlaon.

● Fairly recent (1950–1979)

ECOLOGY Habitat The original description of the species reported that the type was “one of a pair shot out of a large fruiting tree on the edge of a camp clearing, at an altitude of 3600 feet”, i.e. 1,090 m (Ripley and Rabor 1955). A slightly different version is that it was “taken from a tall tree growing on a ridge with a very deep ravine on one side...at about 3700 feet elevation”, i.e. 1,120 m (Rabor 1964). Despite this, the species may have been chiefly a lowland bird, in which case it may well be extinct since no forest survives below 750 m in northern Negros (Brooks *et al.* 1992); indeed, both these points are discernible in Ripley and Rabor (1956), who indicated first that forests at 750–1,350 m “are halfway between the genuine lowland dipterocarp forest type... and the real mid-mountain forest type”, and second that below 900 m “the mountain slopes have been entirely cleared... so that actually the virgin forests begin about 3500 feet above sea level”, i.e. at that stage less than 100 m below the elevation at which the type was collected. Even if it could survive in the highlands, all pigeons and fruit-doves are hunted on Mt Canlaon, and its survival may be jeopardised by this (Brooks *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a).

Food Nothing is known.

Breeding Nothing is known.

Migration Nothing is known.

THREATS Hunting and habitat destruction may have already exterminated the species (Collar *et al.* 1994).

MEASURES TAKEN Mt Canlaon is a CPPAP site (see Appendix). No other measures are known except that in the mid-1990s the species was featured on an environmental awareness poster focusing on pigeons as part of the “Only in the Philippines” series, funded by British Airways Assisting Conservation and FFI, with text in English and Tagalog (W. L. R. Oliver verbally 1998).

MEASURES PROPOSED Because of the lack of data regarding the species’s status, requirements and distribution, it is not possible to formulate any specific conservation recommendations (although see comments under Negros Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba keayi*). Continued fieldwork in suitable areas is a priority to determine whether the species is extant and, indeed, whether it is a valid taxon (see Remarks 1). If rediscovered, the species should be incorporated as a priority within a conservation strategy for the threatened birds of Negros (see equivalent section under Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*). Fieldworkers on Panay should be alert to the possibility that this species may be present in the lowest-lying remaining forest areas.

REMARKS (1) An alternative explanation for the lack of records would be the possible invalidity of the species: its small size and atypical plumage suggest it might be a runt specimen of Yellow-breasted Fruit-dove *Ptilinopus occipitalis* or of a green-pigeon *Treron*; in one view the verdict must be postponed until the male is described (Mayr 1957; also Brooks *et al.* 1992), although it might be possible to subject the type specimen to biochemical analysis. However, comforting as the notion may be that *P. arcanus* is invalid, the characters that define it seem to suggest otherwise, and its smallness is no guide, given the existence of the still smaller Dwarf Fruit-dove *P. nanus*.