

SANGIHE WHITE-EYE

Zosterops nehrkorni



Critical ■ B1+2b,c,e; C2b; D1

Endangered □ —

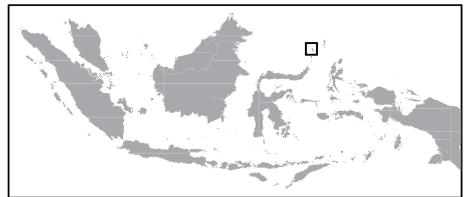
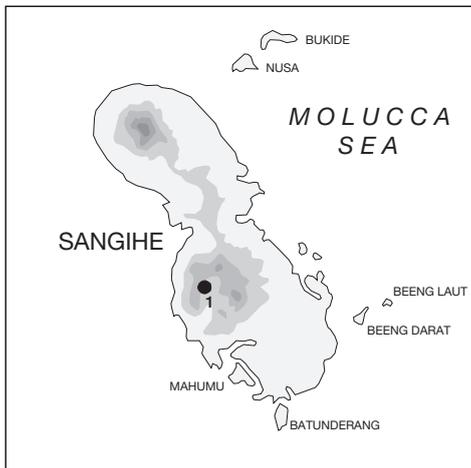
Vulnerable □ D2

This species qualifies as Critical because it appears to survive in tiny numbers at only one locality, habitat at which continues to be destroyed and degraded, such that its overall range and population are inferred to be declining.

DISTRIBUTION The Sangihe White-eye (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the island of Sangihe north of Sulawesi, Indonesia. Records (see Remarks 2) are from:

■ **INDONESIA** *Sangihe* unspecified locality (probably near Manganitu, on Gunung Sahendaruman: see Rasmussen *et al.* 2000, also Hinkelmann and Heinze 1990), December 1886 (Blasius 1888, Meyer and Wigglesworth 1898); **Gunung Sahendaruman**, 750–850 m, one glimpsed at Tukade Batu in November 1998 and three different birds in song at three different localities above Malamenggu in February 1999 (J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999, Rasmussen *et al.* 2000), and at adjacent Gunung Sahengbalira, 920 m, three birds together on two dates in August 1996 (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999; also *Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 25: 66, Rasmussen *et al.* 2000), 900 m, three birds, November 1996 (Riley 1997a, Wardill and Hunowu 1998, Rasmussen *et al.* 2000).

POPULATION Numbers of this species must be very low. The total area of forest on Gunung Sahengbalira was c.800 ha (8 km²) in 1998 (D. Hicks *in litt.* 1998). The fact that only a single specimen was obtained in explorations of Sangihe in the nineteenth century, as was the case with the Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi* (see relevant account), suggests that it may already have been rare then (J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999). The fact that only four records were made over five months of fieldwork in the Sahengbalira forest, 1998–1999, suggests that it is certainly extremely rare now (J. Riley *in litt.* 1999).



The distribution of Sangihe White-eye
Zosterops nehrkorni: (1) Gunung Sahendaruman.
● Recent (1980–present)

ECOLOGY Habitat In August 1996 the species was observed in the canopy and subcanopy of primary montane ridge-top (low-stature) forest with a considerable density of *Pandanus* (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999, Rasmussen *et al.* 2000); in November 1996 the birds were c.4 m up in the mid-storey (J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999). This area is characterised as broadleaf-trophophyllous tropical low montane rainforest (D. Hicks *in litt.* 1999). Extensive fieldwork in other habitats and at other sites on Sangihe indicates that the species is strictly confined to primary forest above 750 m, and hence is much more specialised than its relative, the Black-fronted White-eye *Zosterops atrifrons* (see Remarks 1).

Food Birds in the mid-storey were gleaning leaves for insects (J. Riley, J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999).

Breeding Three birds singing in February strongly suggests breeding or pre-breeding activity (J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999).

THREATS The species is highly vulnerable to any further degradation of the tiny amount of primary forest remaining on Sangihe (see Threats under Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla sanghirensis*). If, like many congeners, it is relatively wide-ranging in search of fruit, so small an area may critically restrain the population. The rarity of the Mauritius White-eye *Z. chloronothos* and Seychelles White-eye *Z. modestus*, and the near-extinction of the White-chested White-eye *Z. albogularis*, are now explicable as the effect of rat predation of nests (Collar *et al.* 1994, BirdLife 2000), and if Sangihe was originally rat-free it may well be that its endemic white-eye has been more susceptible than its Sulawesi counterpart.

The Sangihe White-eye is one of (now) seven threatened members of the suite of (now) 10 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Sangihe and Talaud Endemic Bird Area” (see Remarks 6 under Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi*), threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

MEASURES TAKEN A concerted programme of field research, conservation awareness and collaboration with local government was carried out by Action Sampiri in 1996 and 1998–1999, and is continuing (some information is given in the equivalent section under Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher).

MEASURES PROPOSED The conservation of remaining forest at Gunung Sahendaruman is critical for the survival of this species. Some information is given in the equivalent section under Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher. If possible (but it is accepted that encounter rates have been so low that this may not be feasible) an ecological evaluation of the species (including a study of potential nest predators) would be helpful, to determine any constraints on the population that could yet be mitigated.

REMARKS (1) This is a somewhat larger bird than its relative the Black-fronted White-eye *Z. atrifrons*, and differs in several morphological features, most notably its bright pinkish bill and legs (Rasmussen *et al.* 2000); indeed its closest relative was at one stage gauged to be Black-fronted White-eye *Z.* (now *Z. minor*) *chrysolaemus* of New Guinea (Blasius 1888, Meyer and Wigglesworth 1898). The fact that it is specialised on primary upland forest further distinguishes it from the Black-fronted White-eye, which is common from sea-level to 800 m in North Sulawesi in gardens and secondary forest, and indeed suggests a difference worthy of species-status recognition (Riley 1997a, Wardill and Hunowu 1998, Rasmussen *et al.* 2000). (2) Riley (1997a,b) published a record for September 1995 which is now felt to be unreliable, and is withdrawn (J. Riley, J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999; also Rasmussen *et al.* 2000).