

Progress in the White-winged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata* Action Plan Project: a call for information

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The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust has begun a project to clarify the status of the White-winged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata* in the wild and the conservation actions necessary to ensure its survival. The Trust first took an interest in this South-East Asian species in 1968, when concern over its rapid decline led it to be declared the subject of World Wildlife Fund Project 406. Since then protective measures have included a captive breeding programme at The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust and various centres in India, Thailand, Hong Kong and elsewhere. As yet, few nature reserves have been declared specifically to conserve White-winged Wood Duck and their habitat, although the Duck is found in at least six protected nature reserves declared to protect other animals.

Project outline

The first step has been to establish links with approximately 50 people throughout South-East Asia who have local expertise and can provide information on White-winged Wood Duck. With their help, a technical report is being compiled, collating all known information on the ecology of the species and its past and present range. With this information, conservation measures will be recommended on the basis of feasibility and priority. A smaller "glossy" document will also be produced to promote the conservation plan. This document will be translated into local languages.

Preliminary results

A literature review has confirmed that the species was formerly widespread in South-East Asia with reliable historical records from northeast India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh), Bangladesh (Chittagong Hills), Burma, Laos, Vietnam,

Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia (Sumatra and Java). It can be stated with confidence that White-winged Wood Duck are now extinct in Malaysia (no records since 1909) and Java, but that isolated populations still persist in forest fragments in India, Thailand and Southern Sumatra. The species was rediscovered in Vietnam as recently as 5 January 1990 in Nam Cat Tien Forest Reserve (area 36,500 ha). Its present status in the other countries has yet to be established. In Bangladesh, access has been restricted to the Chittagong Hill Tracts since 1981 when Wood Duck were last seen there.

White-winged Wood Duck occur in lowland rainforest and swamp forest that provide slow or static water bodies for feeding (rivers, pools, swamps). They are found at very low densities for a duck, requiring an estimated 100 ha of optimal habitat per pair. They are difficult to census, as they do not form large flocks and a method of identifying individuals has yet to be found. They are most often seen flying and calling along river tracts at dawn and dusk. They nest in holes in the larger trees that are the first to be removed when an area of forest is logged. In Bangladesh they nest in civit trees *Swintonia floribunda* and barta trees *Artocarpus lakoocha* up to 25 m off the ground, while in Sumatra they nest in rengas trees (a complex of species from the family Anonaceae). A limited supply of suitable nest holes is one possible explanation of their low density.

The protection of large parts of South Sumatra should have a high priority, as this region contains the largest known population of ducks. Furthermore, the forest in Sumatra is being cleared rapidly by development programmes, including the transmigration of people from the more densely populated Java, so rapid implementation of conservation measures is imperative.

Further research into the bird's status and ecology is urgently needed. Anyone who is able to provide further information on this species or

other threatened wildfowl (for list see Kear & Williams 1978, Kear 1979, Collar & Andrew 1988) should contact the Threatened Species

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References

Collar, N.J. & Andrew, P. 1988. *Birds to Watch, the ICBP World Checklist of Threatened Birds*. ICBP Technical Publication No. 8.

Kear, J. & Williams, G. 1978. Waterfowl at risk. *Wildfowl* 29:5-21.

Kear, J. 1979. Wildfowl at risk, 1979. *Wildfowl* 30:159-161.

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