However, all observations in which the habitat has been recorded are from secondary forest, suggesting that this is the species's preferred habitat or that it may be rather adaptable to habitat change.

The Isabela Oriole is apparently not now hunted or collected, so the only plausible causes of its apparent decline are habitat loss and/or competition with the closely related White-lored Oriole. Competition and replacement by related species following habitat disturbance is occurring with the Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis*, a Luzon endemic which is being replaced by Blue-crowned Racquet-tail *P. discurus* in southern Luzon (Collar *et al.* 1999). Effective habitat conservation is necessary and could become a reality in the near future if conservation initiatives in the NSMNP yield success. The observation of the Isabela Oriole at Mansarong in 1994 (Van der Linde 1995) was not in the NSMNP (*contra* Collar *et al.* 1999) and the Mansarong area is not officially protected.

The species has not been observed in Bataan since 1947 (Collar *et al.* 1999) and in fact only two pairs and one individual have been observed since 1961: the pair described here, a pair in Mansarong in 1994 (Van der Linde 1995) and an individual in Quirino province in 1993 (Gamauf and Tebbich 1995), with the last two observations not considered absolutely certain (Collar 1998). It seems to be defensible and suitably precautionary to assume that not more than 250 mature Isabela Orioles survive in the wild. Given the continued destruction and fragmentation of Luzon's lowland forest, the population is likely to be declining, and each subpopulation may number less than 50 individuals. Thus it would seem appropriate to elevate this species to the rank of Critically Endangered, under criterion C2a(i) of the IUCN Red List (i.e. fewer than 250 mature individuals, all subpopulations numbering fewer than 50 individuals and a continuing population decline).

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Notes on Elliot's Pheasant *Syrmaticus ellioti*, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* and Mountain Scops Owl *Otus spilocephalus* from Hunan, China

OLIVER KOMAR, BRETT W. BENZ and GUOJUN CHEN

We conducted baseline avian inventories at two reserves in Hunan, People's Republic of China, which were previously poorly known ornithologically. The avifauna at both sites included a broad range of generalist species typical of secondary vegetation and disturbed habitats. Complete inventory results are available from the University of Kansas Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center or from the authors. Here we describe three noteworthy records: an unusual plumage of Elliot's Pheasant *Syrmaticus ellioti*, an immature plumage of Mountain Scops Owl *Otus spilocephalus*, and geographic differen-

Plate 1. Immature Mountain Scops Owl *Otus spilocephalus*, Shun Huang Shan, Hunan, China, August 2002.

tiation among two subspecies of Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*.

Shun Huang Shan Nature Reserve covers 18,100 ha in Dongan and Xinning counties in south-west Hunan (26°25′N 111°02′E). Inventory efforts were conducted in extensive stands of 10-m tall bamboo interspersed with 16-m tall coniferous pine forest and semi-deciduous broadleaved forest, from 21 August to 3 September 2002, on the lower slopes (500–950 m) of Shun Huang Mountain. Da Wei Shan Nature Reserve covers 5,200 ha in the Lianyun mountains in Liuyong county, north-east Hunan (28°25′N 114°07′E). We surveyed the site during 5–14 September 2002, between 700 m and 1,450 m, with the majority of effort around 1,300 m near Yuquan lake. Habitats included stands of bamboo approximately 10 m tall, pine and deciduous broadleaved forest 15 m tall, and dense stands of chaparral-like vegetation.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

ELLIOT'S PHEASANT *Syrmaticus ellioti*

OK observed two individuals of this south-east Chinese endemic: a female in shrubby habitat near the edge of a grassy marsh at 1,450 m in Da Wei Shan reserve (9 September 2002), and a male in bamboo forest, <100 m from rice paddies, at c.770 m in Shun Huang Shan reserve (29 August 2002). This male was unusual in that it resembled a typical *S. ellioti* (with a white belly, brown back with bright white scapular stripe, and broadly barred tail), except that the head and neck were dark green, suggesting the possibility of

Plate 2a. Adult male Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers, Hunan, China. Left: *Pomatorhinus ruficollis styani* from Da Wei Shan Nature Reserve (KU NHM 92681); Right: *P. r. hunanensis* from Shun Huang Shan Nature Reserve (KU NHM 92633). **2b**. Lateral view of the same birds.

local hybridisation with Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*. These sites are well within the species's known range (Shen *et al*. 2000, BirdLife International 2001). Currently, the species is listed as Vulnerable given continued habitat destruction and fragmentation as well as hunting pressure. The population status for this species is unclear, with estimates of 10,000–50,000 individuals (BirdLife International 2001), indicating the need for detailed population studies.

MOUNTAIN SCOPS OWL *Otus spilocephalus*

An immature in transitional plumage was captured in a mist-net at Shun Huang Shan on 28 August 2002, at 770 m, and was released after being measured and photographed. We identified the individual based on the pale yellow bill and unstreaked breast feathers (Plate 1), which differentiate it from sympatric congeners. It lacked the supposedly characteristic large white scapular spots, indicating that it was probably an immature (Robson 2000; P. Rasmussen *in litt.* 2004). The wing-chord was 150 mm, and body mass was 81 g. Currently, geographic boundaries of the eight recognised subspecies are poorly resolved. However, the rich rufous plumage of this individual identified it as *O. s. latouchi*, which ranges from south-east China to north Thailand (del Hoyo *et al.* 1999, MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000). This locality record represents the northern extreme of this subspecies's range as well as the northern limit of Mountain Scops Owl in south-east China.

STREAK-BREASTED SCIMITAR BABBLER *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*

This species was a common inhabitant of dense understorey at both study sites. We collected two distinct forms, with six specimens from Shun Huang Shan representing *P. r. hunanensis*, and four specimens from Da Wei Shan representing *P. r. styani*. These records agree with distributions reported by Cheng (1962), where *P. r. hunanensis* was described as *P. r. intermedius* (Cheng [1994] used current taxonomy of *P. r. hunanensis*). Specimens from Shun Huang Shan exhibit dark brown breast streaking and dark brown to rufous lateral neck-patches just behind the ear, while specimens from Da Wei Shan are overall paler, with light rufous breast streaking and rufous lateral neck-patches (Plate 2). This differs from the account in Cheng (1962), where the breast and upper body colour are described as the same in both populations. Specimens from Da Wei Shan have black maxilla, with a lighter hook and pale yellow to ivory tomia and mandible. In contrast, specimens from Shun Huang Shan have black restricted to the proximal two-thirds of the maxilla, with the distal third pale yellow to ivory; the tomia and mandible are also pale yellow to ivory (Plate 2b). All specimens are deposited at the University of Kansas Natural History Museum. Currently, ten subspecies are recognised within the broad range of *P. ruficollis*; however, the taxonomy and distributional limits of this polymorphic species remain unclear and require further investigation.

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