

AMENDMENTS TO APPENDICES I AND II OF THE CONVENTION

A. PROPOSAL

Inclusion of Rheinartia ocellata in Appendix I.

B. PROPONENT

Malaysia.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

11. Class: Aves
12. Order: Galliformes
13. Family: Phasianidae, subfamily Argusianinae
14. Species: Rheinartia ocellata (Elliot, 1871)
15. Common Names: English: crested argus
French: rheinart ocellé
Spanish:
German: Perlenfasan, Rheinartfasan
Malay: Kuang Raya
16. Code Numbers: -

2. Biological Data

21. Distribution: Two subspecies are recognized:

Rheinartia ocellata ocellata (Elliot, 1871) (E: Rheinart's crested argus; Fr: rheinart d'Annam) from central Viet Nam and Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Rheinartia ocellata nigricens (Rothschild, 1902) (E: Malay crested argus; Fr: rheinart malais) from central Malaysia.

Viet Nam and Lao People's Democratic Republic: The nominate subspecies occurred in the range between the provinces of Vinh and Tranninh (Lao PDR) in the North (lat. 19°N) and Quinhon Province (Viet Nam) in the South (lat. 14°N).

It used to be common in some parts of central Annam (on very damp mountain slopes, from Tourane to Quangtri and Laobao) (Delacour, 1964). Military activities, habitat loss and hunting have reduced its range and its habitat tolerance considerably (Davison, in litt., 1985).

Malaysia: The Malay crested argus is known from Gunung Rabong, Gunung Tulang Rabong, the Gunung Tahan Massif and Gunung Gagau (see map). These mountains represent high points on a sinuous sandstone/quartz ridge running West to East, which marks the border between the states of Kelantan (to the North) and Pahang (to the South). Gunung Perlis, Penumpu, and Mandi Angin have not

been visited to check for Rheinartia, but possibly, the subspecies occurs on all of these mountains. The subspecies is unlikely to occur elsewhere, because this sandstone block is discrete, separated by lowlands from any other mountainous areas.

Records from other areas in Malaysia and from Gunung Leuser on Sumatra have been checked and proved to be incorrect (Davison, 1977 and in litt., 1985).

22. Population: The population of the nominate subspecies has been seriously reduced. It is very likely that it has been severely hunted for food. It is suffering from great habitat disturbance (Davison, in litt., 1985). There are no population estimates, although it was considered common within parts of its restricted range in 1924. More than 400 were easily captured in 4 months in 1925 (Delacour, 1964; Delacour and Jabouille, 1925).

Although reports state that it has not been seen in the field for a very long time (King, 1979), the nominate subspecies still survives (Luthin, pers. comm., 1985).

The Malayan population is likely to consist of several hundred individuals (perhaps even several thousand). There is no evidence that the population is decreasing, except perhaps on the North West face of Gunung Rabong, which is logged (Davison, 1977 and in litt., 1985).

23. Habitat:

Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam: Deep, damp forests on foothills and mountains, usually from sea-level up to 915 m., occasionally up to 1,525 m. (Delacour, 1951 and 1964).

Malaysia: Confined to a narrow altitude belt (range 800 m. to 1,050 m.) in a mountainous stone/quartz ridge (Davison, 1979). This confinement is probably due to competition with the great argus (Argusianus argus, see 5.).

3. Trade Data

31. National Utilization: The long tail feathers of these birds are, or were, much appreciated by the Annamites as theatrical ornaments (Delacour and Jabouille, 1925). Reduction of the Lao/Viet Nam population is probably caused by forest destruction in combination with hunting for food. This aggravation is often caused by military activities, including repeated defoliation by herbicides (King, 1979). In Malaysia, nowadays, it is not used for food, hunted or otherwise exploited by local people (Davison, in litt., 1985)
32. Legal International Trade: According to ancient chronicles, on certain occasions, the crested argus has been sent by the Emperors of Annam as a religious gift to the Emperors of China, and it has been suggested that these birds have been used as the originals for the legendary Chinese Phoenix (Delacour, 1964; Jabouille, 1930).

The nominate subspecies was brought to Europe and Japan, at regular intervals since 1924, when 80 birds were captured for transport to Europe. Most of the birds died soon, because of an epidemic disease or due to the transport (Delacour and Jabouille, 1925). Before World War II, the species bred a few times in captivity. By the end of World War II, no captive specimens had survived in the West (Delacour, 1964).

The Malaysian subspecies is not known to be ever held in captivity or in another way traded in (Davison, in litt., 1985).

33. Illegal Trade: None is known to the proponent.
34. Potential Trade Threats: This is perhaps the last great pheasant which does not exist in captivity and is hence valuable and highly prized. If it was caught, pheasant breeders would pay much for the privilege of being the first to establish this species in captivity both for the reputation as well and the potential monetary gain.

4. Protection Status

41. National: In Malaysia, the species is fully protected as is its habitat. All, except a small part of the Gunung Rabong population, lies within the National Park Taman Negara. The National Park is well protected, free from logging and hunting. The subspecies inhabits mid-mountain slopes, which are little visited and not commercially attractive, e.g. to logging (Davison, in litt., 1985).
42. International: The species is included in the 1979 IUCN/ICBP Red Data Book on birds [Status: 'Rare'. (King, 1979)].
43. Additional Protection Needs: The status of the nominate subspecies, probably, requires all conservation possibilities, in order to ensure its survival.

5. Information on Similar Species

In central Malaysia, the great argus (Argusianus argus) occurs on the same mountain slopes as the crested argus. If they are not seen, males of the species can be distinguished by their calls. The distinguishing features of males of the crested argus are, the white crest, the very long tail, which is also very broad and which lacks a pale tip, and the mainly black plumage. The great argus occurs on the slopes from sea-level to 1,000 m. and appears to limit the crested argus to a very narrow belt above this (Davison, 1979).

6. Comments from Countries of Origin

One major area where this species is found has become accessible during the last few years. It is not practical to maintain a constant vigilance of over the area due to its size and the numerous possible approaches to it.

7. Additional Remarks

Neither subspecies is at present represented in captivity. The clutch size is restricted to two and the birds take three years to mature. Captive breeding of large numbers would, therefore, never be practical and the species survival is really dependent on the survival of its habitat (Howman, 1985).

8. References

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