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The Rare Bali Starling



Leucopsar rothschildi

The Bali Starling, also known as Rothschild's Mynah, Bali Myna, or Bali Mynah is a medium-sized (up to 25 cm long), stocky myna, almost wholly white with a long, drooping crest, and black tips on the wings and tail. The bird has blue bare skin around the eyes, greyish legs and a yellow bill. Both sexes are similar.

Naming

Placed in the monotypic genus *Leucopsar*, it appears to be most closely related to *Sturnia* and the Brahminy Starling which is currently placed in *Sturnus* but will probably soon be split therefrom as *Sturnus* as presently delimited is highly paraphyletic (Jönsson & Fjeldså 2006). The specific name commemorates the British ornithologist Lord Rothschild.

Distribution

The Bali Starling is restricted to the island of Bali in Indonesia, where it is the island's only endemic vertebrate species. (An endemic subspecies, the Bali Tiger, has been extinct since 1937.) The bird was discovered in 1910, and in 1991 was designated the fauna symbol of Bali. Its local name is jalak Bali .

Behaviour

In its natural habitat however it is far less conspicuous, using tree tops for cover and—unlike other starlings—usually coming to the ground only to drink; this would seem to be an adaptation to the fact that it is instantly noticeable to predators when out in the open.

Endangered

The Bali Starling, Bali's regional mascot, is critically endangered, hovering immediately above extinction in the wild for several years now (BirdLife International 2006). The Bali Starling is listed in Appendix I of CITES. Trade even in captive-bred specimens is strictly regulated and the species is not generally available legally to private individuals. However, experienced aviculturists may become affiliated with the captive-breeding program, allowing them to legally keep this species. About 1,000 individuals are believed to be held in captivity legally. The number of captive birds bought on black market is estimated to be twice the number of legally-acquired individuals in the captive breeding program.

There are 2 remaining locations on Bali where the birds exist in the wild: the West Bali National Park; and Bali's small island of Nusa Penida

There were an estimated 350 birds in the West Bali National Park in the 1980s. During the 1990s over 400 cage-bred birds were released into the park to increase their numbers. But by 2005, the park authorities estimated the number to have fallen to less than 10. This decline was caused primarily by poachers responding to the lucrative demand for rare birds in the caged bird market.

The second and much larger population of Bali Starlings now exists on the island of Nusa Penida and its sister islands

A bird's heart beats 400 times per minute while they are at rest. When they are flying however, their heart could beat up to 1000 beats per minute.

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of Nusa Ceningan, Nusa Lembongan, which are 14km off the south east coast of Bali. 64 cage-bred Bali Starlings were released onto Nusa Penida over 2 years from 2006 by Friends of the National Parks Foundation (FNPF), the Indonesian NGO that operates the bird rehabilitation and release program on Nusa Penida. FNPF's monitoring of the released birds state that their numbers had increased to +100 by 2009, and had spread across Penida, with small numbers also breeding on Ceningan and Lembongan.

The success of the project to create a wild population on Nusa Penida is primarily due to the threat of poachers being removed, combined with a successful breeding, rehabilitation and release program.

The removal of the threat from poachers was achieved by Drh I. Gede Nyoman Bayu Wirayudha (veterinarian) and his Indonesian NGO, Friends of the National Parks Foundation (FNPF) by persuading all Penida communities to protect birds. FNPF spent 2 years counseling all of the key people of influence on the Penida islands on the benefits of protecting birds and conservation. In 2006 all 35 villages (now 41 villages) unanimously agreed to make bird protection part of their traditional regulations ("awig-awig"), making it a social and spiritual obligation for all Penida residents to protect birds. Bali Starlings and other endangered birds that are released by FNPF onto Nusa Penida are now protected by the local communities. Monitoring of the birds by FNPF indicate that none of the released Bali Starlings or their subsequent offspring have been stolen. FNPF retains the ongoing commitment of the Penida communities to protect birds through a variety of community development and community education projects ... all of which bring social and economic benefits to the local residents.

The birds released onto Nusa Penida were bred by the Begawan Foundation in Ubud, Bali, under expert supervision by Bali's leading avian veterinarian, Drh I. G. N. Bayu Wirayudha. His methodology ensured that the birds were bred and prepared to survive in the wild. Two pairs of birds were purchased from the aviaries of Mr Nick Wileman, a successful and knowledgeable breeder living near London, and brought to the Begawan Foundation's breeding facility in Bali on 24 June 1999. By November 2005, the Begawan Foundation's captive population had grown to 97 birds.

The birds and cages were then transferred to FNPF's bird centre on Nusa Penida and over a period of 2 years, FNPF rehabilitated and released 64 birds onto Nusa Penida.

On July 10, 2006, 25 micro-chipped birds were released into the wild during a ceremony that involved local villagers, temples and provincial and local government officials. Microchips were supplied by Theo Pagel, Director of the Cologne Zoo in Germany.

Within two weeks of their release, several birds had paired up and were observed bringing nesting materials to a variety of local trees, ficus, sugar palms and coconuts. Their first eggs had hatched by September 10, and on September 28, three birds instead of two were observed on the nesting tree.

Twelve more birds were released on December 12, 2006, and this flock was soon joined by two young birds that were the offspring of birds from the first release. On April 28, 2007, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of the Republic of Indonesia and First Lady Kristiani Herawati accepted an invitation from FNPF's founder, Drh I. G. N. Bayu Wirayudha, to release a further 12 birds, when they visited Nusa Penida to celebrate the launch of a ferry service to mainland Bali.

Further official recognition came during a visit to Nusa Penida on August 25 by the Indonesian Forestry Minister M. S. Kaban and Dr Ir Tonny Suhartono, the Director General for Forestry Preservation and Nature Conservation. These two dignitaries officially announced that the island was a suitable site for further releases of Bali Starlings.

FNPF and the Begawan Foundation continue to monitor and observe the birds in the wild, tracking where the birds nest and breed, ensuring that each bird released or born is followed throughout its life. This important role ensures that any future releases will be made with planned knowledge of how the bird survives in the wild, what food is required, and how it breeds.



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