

**The Nicobar Megapode and
other Endemic Avifauna
of the Nicobar Islands**

Status & Conservation



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Abstract

The Nicobar Megapode, a mound nesting megapode, occurs as two subspecies, *Megapodius nicobariensis nicobariensis* and *M. n. abbotti*, endemic to the Nicobar Islands. Thought to be endangered, this survey found it on almost all Nicobar islands where it historically occurred and concluded that, as a species, it is currently not endangered. It has probably become extinct only on inhabited Pilo Milo island. While *M. n. abbotti* is secure other than on small outlying islets, *M. n. nicobariensis* is threatened on all but 3 islands of its range. Loss of population of *M. n. nicobariensis* was indicated both by significantly lower mound densities and by a higher proportion of abandoned mounds to active mounds when compared with *M. n. abbotti*. Data were collected for 127 active mounds of *M. n. abbotti* and 85 active mounds of *M. n. nicobariensis*, and it was estimated that 848 and 312 active mounds respectively are present, and the population of the species is between 4500 and 8000 adult birds. Although hunting and collection of eggs existed, the main threat is the loss of habitat, particularly coastal forest which is the megapode's primary nesting habitat, to coconut plantations.

Of the 176 species of birds that are endemic to the zoogeographic subregion of the Indian peninsula and its environs, 14 are endemic to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Thus while the Andaman & Nicobar islands account for only 0.2% of the land mass of South Asia, it has approximately 8% of the endemic avifauna of the region, thus making the islands a high priority area in the conservation of India's avifauna. The new IUCN criteria for assigning threat status, have been applied to each species and subspecies endemic to the Nicobar islands. The application of the criteria on 45 species and subspecies indicates that 18 species or subspecies endemic to the Nicobar islands are endangered (1), vulnerable (6) or near threatened (11). Six species and subspecies are data deficient and 21 are of less concern or abundant. Six bird species have been introduced in the Nicobar islands. Of these, four are from the mainland and two from the Andaman islands. The introduced Andaman Redwhiskered Bulbul may result in the extinction of the endemic Nicobar Bulbul.

Although as much as 80 % of the Nicobar islands are still covered by primary forest, and that at least 60 % are relatively undisturbed, the trend over the last decade gives rise to grave concern. Based on the number of endemics present, the Nancowry group of islands was identified to be of primary importance to endemic avifauna followed by the Great Nicobar and Car Nicobar groups. The priority islands for avian conservation are Great Nicobar, Camorta, Katchall, Nancowry and Car Nicobar. A protected area network whereby the Nicobars will receive the necessary legislature to ensure their long-term survival is proposed. Two issues, population growth and development were identified as of primary concern of the Nicobar group of islands. Specific issues of concern that have grave implications to the Nicobar islands are given. The single largest threat is a proposal to make Great Nicobar a free trade port and to build a dry dock and refuelling facility in the Galathea bay which, if implemented, will destroy the Nicobar islands.

Keywords: Megapodes, Nicobar megapode, endemics, avifauna, Andaman & Nicobar Islands