

***Gracula religiosa*** Linnaeus, 1758

**FAMILY:** Sturnidae

**COMMON NAMES:** Common Hill Myna, Hill Mynah or Mynah (English); Mainate Religieux, Merles des Indes (French); Miná de la India, Miná Religioso (Spanish); Burung Tiong (Malay).

**GLOBAL CONSERVATION STATUS:** Listed as Least Concern in the *2004 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (2004 IUCN Red List).

**SIGNIFICANT TRADE REVIEW FOR:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand.

**Range States selected for review**

Range State	Exports* (1994-2003)	Urgent, possible or least concern	Comments
Bangladesh	2	Least concern	Insignificant reported exports.
Bhutan	0	Least concern	Insignificant reported exports.
Brunei Darussalam	4	Least concern	Insignificant reported exports.
Cambodia	70	Least concern	Negligible reported exports.
India	1	Least concern	Export banned since 1972; declines owing to habitat loss and domestic trade; illegal domestic trade an issue
Malaysia	42,385	Possible concern	Declines owing to habitat loss and trade (largely domestic); export quotas exceeded in 2002/2003; no population monitoring in place; concerns regarding record keeping
Myanmar	550	Least concern	Illegal trade reported; may be of concern if exports increase
Nepal	0	Least concern	Declines owing to habitat loss and domestic trade; some illegal trade reported
Sri Lanka	0	Least concern	No reported exports.
Thailand	4	Least concern	Declines owing to habitat loss and trade (largely domestic)

\* Excluding re-exports

**SUMMARY**

*Gracula religiosa* is one of the most popular avian pets in Asia, owing to its ability to mimic noises and human speech. This species has a large range, with an estimated global extent of occurrence of 3,880,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The global population size has not been quantified, but it is presumed to be large since the species remains common in Myanmar, Cambodia, and a number of other places within its wide range. Global population trends have not been quantified, but the species has evaluated as Least Concern in the 2004 IUCN Red List. The species is protected in some countries.

This species has been heavily traded: from 1994-2003, over 170,000 wild-caught individuals were reported as exported from range States. Virtually all trade is in live birds, mainly from Viet Nam, China and Malaysia and to a lesser extent Indonesia. In some range States national trade appears to be of greater size than international trade and may be a more significant driver of population declines e.g. in Indonesia and the Philippines, although it is difficult to distinguish the impacts of international versus national trade.

Trade, acting in conjunction with habitat loss throughout the species' range, appears to have seriously impacted wild populations in some areas, with significant trade-related declines noted in China, Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia, Thailand and to a lesser extent the Philippines and parts of India and Lao PDR.

Trade is considered of Possible Concern in Malaysia. Although Peninsular Malaysia has set an export quota, and believes populations to be stable (CITES Management Authority Malaysia *in litt.* 2004), no

systematic population monitoring is in place to confirm that exports are maintained within sustainable levels.

## SPECIES CHARACTERISTICS

The single species *Gracula religiosa* is currently recognised by CITES and BirdLife International (Sibley and Monroe 1990, 1993) with around ten subspecies. Of these, *G.r. indica* (of Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats of India) is recognised as a separate species by Rasmussen and Anderton (2005), and may well be by BirdLife International in the future. *G.r. batuensis*, *G.r. enganensis*, and *G.r. robusta* are all endemic to islands off Sumatra in Indonesia, and were recognised as separate species by Feare and Craig (1998).

The species occurs in Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats of India, east and north-east India east to southern China, and south through Southeast Asia to Palawan (the Philippines), Borneo, and Flores (Indonesia). The species is indigenous to: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. There are also introduced populations in several places, including Puerto Rico (to USA). The introduced population on Christmas Island (to Australia) has died out.

Declines have been noted in China, Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and parts of India and Lao PDR. In all of these countries, a combination of habitat loss and trapping has been blamed, except in the Philippines where trapping is viewed as the sole cause. The major trade demand has been domestic, rather than international.

The species' preferred habitat is moist hill forest at ca.300-2,000 m altitude, but it is found down to sea level. Although typically inhabiting dense moist or semi-evergreen forest, they are commonly observed at forest edges, clearings, and cultivated areas (particularly where there are lots of large flowering trees), and sometimes mangroves (Feare and Craig, 1998). The species' preferred habitat has undergone severe historic losses in most range States. In captivity, birds usually live to be around 20 years, and first breed at one or two years of age. Clutches usually comprise two or three eggs (usually two for *G. r. indica*) (Feare and Craig, 1998).

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

*Gracula religiosa* is one of the most popular avian pets in Asia, owing to its ability to mimic noises and human speech and is traded in large numbers both nationally within range States and internationally. As a result of concerns about international trade, this species was included in CITES Appendix III at the request of Thailand in 1992 and subsequently included in Appendix II in 1997.

The majority of exports were destined for Europe (particularly Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and France, together comprising 31%) and Japan (5%), with many exported first to Malaysia or Singapore (53%).

**Table 1: Exports excluding re-export of live wild *Gracula religiosa*, 1994-2003**

Export country	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Totals
Bangladesh									2		2
Brunei					2	2					4
Cambodia										70	70
China	20	4285	37684	4001	560	7					46557
India										1	1
Indonesia	795	48	60	159	171	193	95	161			1682
Malaysia	4398	2232	1078	2420	6060	3889	6223	9138	3794	3153	42385
Myanmar									200	350	550
Singapore	777	283	150				30				1240
Thailand		4									4
Viet Nam	20125	4150	5520	6880	8611	13295	19475	1		3	78060
<b>Totals</b>	<b>26115</b>	<b>11002</b>	<b>44492</b>	<b>13460</b>	<b>15404</b>	<b>17386</b>	<b>25823</b>	<b>9300</b>	<b>3996</b>	<b>3577</b>	<b>170 555</b>

(Source: CITES trade statistics derived from the *CITES Trade Database*, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK)

N.B.: the species was transferred from Appendix III to Appendix II in September 1997, so earlier data are likely to be more incomplete.

Table 2: Export quotas for live birds from range States, 1994-2006

Range State	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indonesia				180	190	175	135	135	0	0	-	-	-
Malaysia									<b>3000</b>	<b>3000</b>	-	-	-

Quota figures in bold denote years in which quotas exceeded. Quota figures in this table derived from UNEP-WCMC (2006).

## COUNTRY ACCOUNTS

### Bangladesh

#### Status:

Local (Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

#### Management and trade:

Negligible international trade reported and therefore of Least Concern. No information is available on national trade or national protected status.

### Bhutan

#### Status:

A common resident of foothills (Spierenburg, 2005).

#### Management and trade:

No international trade reported and therefore of Least Concern. No information is available on national trade or national protected status.

### Brunei Darussalam

#### Status:

Widespread in coastal habitats, including peat swamp forests to the east and southeast.

#### Management and trade:

Negligible international trade reported. Commonly kept as a pet nationally, with most, if not all, birds of local origin (Charles *in litt.*, 2006). Not protected under national law, but recent enforcement by the Museum Department has included warning pet shops not to sell any wild birds (Charles *in litt.*, 2006).

### Cambodia

#### Status:

Common in both open and dense forest throughout (Thomas and Poole, 2003).

#### Management and trade:

Negligible international trade reported and therefore of Least Concern. Commonly kept nationally as a pet (Thomas and Poole, 2003). No information available on national protected status.

### India

#### Status:

Locally fairly common (Grimmett *et al.*, 1998; Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005). *G. r. indica* is found in the Western Ghats, *G. r. religiosa* in the Eastern Ghats, and parts of northern India. Declined rapidly in Orissa over last 20 years (Bhujabal, undated).

### **Management and trade:**

Export banned since 1972 and therefore trade is of Least Concern. *G. r. indica* is still caught in large numbers (Feare and Craig, 1998), perhaps for national trade.

### **Malaysia**

#### **Status:**

Limited to lowland and foothill forests in Peninsular Malaysia; almost all the former has now been lost to agriculture. Although still locally common, the species is now generally uncommon, at least partly due to bird trapping, and is now considered "Vulnerable" in Peninsular Malaysia (David Wells *in litt.*, 2005). A common resident through the lowlands and foothills of Borneo (Smythies, 1999; Sheldon *et al.*, 2001). The species adapts well to secondary habitats with trees, but these are also the areas where trapping is highest (Sebastian *in litt.*, 2006). The CITES Management Authority Malaysia believes populations to be stable (CITES Management Authority Malaysia *in litt.* 2004).

#### **Management and trade:**

An annual export quota of 3,000 birds from Malaysia has been in place since 2002, but appears to have been exceeded in 2002 and 2003. There have been no studies carried out to determine if such a harvest level is sustainable, e.g. to support non-detriment findings for this species in Malaysia (Shepherd *in litt.*, 2006). Protected in both Sabah and Sarawak (Smythies, 1999), but licences can be obtained for export under the Sarawak Wild Life Protection Ordinance of 1998. Licences are required in Peninsular Malaysia even to keep this species as a pet, but it is commonly trapped and kept without licences (Shepherd *in litt.*, 2006). Trapping licences are for ten birds over three months (CITES Management Authority Malaysia *in litt.* 2004).

Trade is considered of Possible Concern in Malaysia. No systematic population monitoring is in place to confirm that exports are maintained within sustainable levels. Export quotas set by Peninsular Malaysia for 2001 and 2002 were exceeded in both years.

### **Myanmar**

#### **Status:**

Found below 2,000 m in all but the far north, common to locally very common (Htin Hla *in litt.*, 2005). The species is likely to still be secure given limited habitat loss to date.

#### **Management and trade:**

Listed under Section 9 of the Wildlife Protection Act (Smythies, 1986), making it illegal for any person to capture or possess or sell or buy this species. However, this law is not strongly enforced (Htin Hla *in litt.*, 2005). Exports were reported by Myanmar in 2002 and 2003, with numbers likely to be sustainable and trade therefore of Least Concern. Prior to the Wildlife Protection Act listing, Smythies (1986) refers to a considerable export trade, with several thousand birds shipped at a time. Nonetheless, the most significant trade here is trade domestically for pets (Htin Hla *in litt.*, 2005).

### **Nepal**

#### **Status:**

Frequent in the centre and east, rare in the west (Grimmett *et al.*, 1998). The species is listed as nationally "Vulnerable to extinction" because of habitat loss and hunting/trapping (Baral and Inskipp, 2004).

### **Management and trade:**

No international trade reported by Nepal, but 12 captive-bred birds reported imported from Nepal by United Arab Emirates in 2002-3. All wild bird trade is considered illegal in Nepal, but small levels of domestic trade have been noted (Baral *in litt.*, 2005). Trade is therefore of Least Concern.

### **Sri Lanka**

#### **Status:**

Frequent at mid-altitudes, infrequent elsewhere (Grimmett *et al.*, 1998), and apparently stable (Kaluthota *in litt.*, 2005). Not listed as nationally threatened, but a review is underway.

### **Management and trade:**

No international trade reported and therefore of Least Concern. Under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, all capture and trade is prohibited. Nonetheless, the species is kept as a pet in small numbers in rural areas (Kaluthota *in litt.*, 2005).

### **Thailand**

#### **Status:**

Present in remaining forest, uncommon to fairly common and much reduced by capture and habitat loss (Lekagul and Round, 1991). An average of only 10% of eggs survive to become independent fledglings because of capture rates (Thai Hill Mynah Project, undated).

### **Management and trade:**

Negligible international trade reported and therefore of Least Concern. No information available on national trade or national protected status.

### **PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED THAT ARE NOT RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE IV, PARAS 2(a), 3, or 6(a)**

Illegal international trade is of concern for this species, although its magnitude is understandably difficult to measure. Legislation in China is believed to have significantly slowed illegal trade (e.g., 28,000 individuals to Yunnan (1990-1998) and c.7,000 individuals to Guangxi, perhaps largely from Viet Nam) which was previously hidden within legal trade (CITES Management Authority China *in litt.*, 2004). However, illegal trade continues, and a Hill Myna with avian influenza was recently confiscated from an illegal shipment of birds from mainland China to Taiwan, Province of China (Anon., 2005). Around 1,000 birds were confiscated from illegal traders in Viet Nam in 2004 (CITES Management Authority Viet Nam *in litt.*, 2004). Dealers in Malaysia claim that most individuals of this species are imported (now illegally) from Viet Nam (Shepherd *in litt.*, 2006). Birds smuggled by boat from Palawan are also believed to be destined for Malaysia (Widmann *in litt.*, 2006). Illegal export of birds from Nepal to China is suspected (Baral *in litt.*, 2005). Illegal exports take place from Myanmar along the Chinese and Thai borders (Htin Hla *in litt.*, 2005). Baird (1993) suggested small levels of illegal trade from Lao PDR to Thailand and Viet Nam (in the order of 50 birds to each country per year). Surveys carried out by TRAFFIC in North Sumatra revealed most birds traded there are from Viet Nam, via Malaysia (Shepherd *et al.*, 2004), with at least an element of this illegally.

A total of 670 wild birds was reported as imported from Pakistan, which is not a known range State for this species, and a further 150 birds reported as captive bred. Exports reported by Pakistan amounted to only 400 birds, all declared as captive bred. Confirmation of captive breeding in Pakistan should be sought. Clarification is also needed of imports to Malaysia from the Solomon Islands, of which all but 20 were reported as captive bred. This country is also outside the native range of the species and not known to have substantial bird breeding facilities.

Some inconsistency exists in 1995-6 trade records. Malaysia reported an import of 38,080 birds in total from China but no corresponding exports have been reported by China.

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