

## Re-discovery of the Isabela Oriole *Oriolus isabellae*

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The forest-living, monotypic species Isabela Oriole *Oriolus isabellae* is endemic to the Bataan peninsula and Isabela Province, the Philippines. The last record of the species given by Dickinson *et al.* (1991) was from the Sierra Madre in 1961. There is now virtually no forest left at that site and the species may be close to extinction (Danielsen *et al.* 1994). It has declined to Critically Endangered status and now has a patchy distribution and a highly fragmented range (Collar *et al.* 1994).

On 4 December 1993 we observed an individual of this species halfway between Baguio village and Don Mariano Perez, about 15 km south of Diffun, Quirino Province, and near the border with Nueva Vizcaya, on the west-central ridge (foothills) of the Sierra Madre. It was at 440 m at the edge of a remnant area (1 km<sup>2</sup>) of secondary forest (canopy cover 50-70%), near a two-year old kaingin planted with bananas. The bird was in a mixed flock, near a fruiting tree, comprising two or three Coppersmith Barbets *Megalaima haemacephala*, one Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina striata*, at least five Yellow-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus goiavier*, four Balicassiaos *Dicrurus balicassius*, two or three Philippine Fairy-bluebirds *Irena cyanogaster* and some Elegant Tits *Parus elegans*.

From a distance of 5-6 m the following features could be discerned: a relatively small and slender bird characterized by bright yellow underparts, olive-yellow upperparts, olive-brown wings and tail, reddish-brown eyes, a slender/dainty greyish bill and dark grey legs. The rather similar White-lored Oriole *O. albiloris* was eliminated from consideration because that species has white lores and chin, blackish subterminal spots on a shorter tail, and a shorter, thicker bill.

The future prospects of the Isabela Oriole in the Quirino study area are extremely poor because of its isolation from the more extensive forests of the central Sierra Madre, and its occupancy of a small, fragmented area of less than 100 km<sup>2</sup>.

### REFERENCES

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## A further record of the Isabela Oriole *Oriolus isabellae* from Baggao, Cagayan Province, northern Philippines

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On 8 September 1994 at Mansarong, Baggao, Cagayan Province I observed a large mixed flock of birds, comprising about a dozen species, including some orioles. They were feeding in some fruiting trees along a logging road. An oriole landed on a branch about 6 m away. In full sunlight I could clearly see that the lores and chin were yellow, thus eliminating White-lored Oriole. A second bird, farther away, also showed yellow lores and chin and I concluded that both birds were Isabela Orioles.

Mansarong is a small settlement at the edge of the forest, where small-scale agriculture is practised. The vegetation structure is quite diverse, with patches of remaining forest, agricultural fields, scrubland and gardens. The bird composition is made up of forest species (e.g. Philippine Bulbul *Ixos philippinus* and cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina*), as well as those of more open habitats (e.g. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier* and Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*).

The Sierra Madre mountain range, which is still covered with forest, stretches from north to south along the Pacific coast of Luzon. It covers about 50% of the northern provinces of Cagayan and Isabela. It is an important stronghold for many rare species, including the Isabela Oriole.

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