

# The 2018 IUCN Red List in the Neotropics

**James Lowen, Hannah Wheatley, Claudia Hermes, Ian Burfield and David Wege**

*Neotropical Birding 21 featured a summary of the key implications for the Neotropics of the 2016 IUCN Red List for birds. This article briefs readers on the main changes from the 2018 update.*

**A**s part of its role as the IUCN Red List Authority for birds, BirdLife International is responsible for assessing the global conservation status of each of the world's 11,000 or so bird species, allocating each to a category ranging from Least Concern to Extinct. The latest update was published in November 2018 (BirdLife International 2018). Although much more modest in reach than the comprehensive update carried out in 2016, whose Neotropical dimension was discussed in Symes *et al.* (2017), the 2018 revamp contains a suite of interesting changes for species occurring in the Neotropical Bird Club region that are worth drawing to readers' collective attention.

BirdLife's Red List team updated the information available for roughly 2,300 species worldwide. Globally, this resulted in changes to the categorisation of 89 species; 58 species were 'uplisted' to a higher category of threat, whilst roughly half that number – 31 species – were 'downlisted'. In the Neotropics, 13 species were uplisted (Fig. 2) and slightly more – 18 – were downlisted (Fig. 5). Now let's take a closer look at the individual changes, largely using information made available on BirdLife's 'Globally Threatened Bird Forums' ([globally-threatened-bird-forums.birdlife.org](https://globally-threatened-bird-forums.birdlife.org)). Is the picture quite as rosy as the headline figures suggest?



**1** Red-fronted Macaw *Ara rubrogenys*, Omereque, Cochabamba, Bolivia, November 2013 (Paul B. Jones; [flickr.com/photos/paulbjones](https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulbjones/)). One of two Neotropical species sadly uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered.

**2** Neotropical species 'uplisted' to a higher category of threat in the 2018 IUCN Red List update

		2017 IUCN Red List Category	2018 IUCN Red List Category
Dwarf Tinamou	<i>Taoniscus nanus</i>	VU	EN
Black Swift	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	LC	VU
Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>	NT	VU
Tapajos Hermit	<i>Phaethornis aethopygus</i>	NT	VU
White-tailed Starfrontlet	<i>Coeligena phalerata</i>	LC	NT
Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	LC	NT
Chaco Owl	<i>Strix chacoensis</i>	LC	NT
Red-fronted Macaw	<i>Ara rubrogenys</i>	EN	CR
Brasilia Tapaculo	<i>Scytalopus novacapitalis</i>	NT	EN
Brown-rumped Tapaculo	<i>Scytalopus latebricola</i>	LC	NT
Bahama Nuthatch	<i>Sitta insularis</i>	EN	CR
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>	LC	NT
Blackpoll Warbler	<i>Setophaga striata</i>	LC	NT

Species uplisted to Near Threatened in 2018 included: **3** Chaco Owl *Strix chacoensis*, Santa Teresita de Mazan, La Rioja, Argentina, February 2013 (Silvia Vitale) and **4** White-tailed Starfrontlet *Coeligena phalerata*, El Dorado, Santa Marta, Colombia, March 2015 (José Castaño; ✉ josefc11@gmail.com).

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## Uplistings

Of the 13 uplisted Neotropical species (or, at least, species with a Neotropical dimension to their range), seven were previously considered Least Concern so are new arrivals to the threatened or Near Threatened categories of the Red List. Six are classified as Near Threatened for the first time, of which three were genuine changes, meaning that they need careful watching in order to detect any deterioration towards Vulnerable or higher threat category. These include two birds, familiar to North American readers, whose wintering ranges encompass parts of the northern Neotropics: **Rufous Hummingbird** *Selasphorus rufus* and **Blackpoll Warbler** *Setophaga striata*. Both have undergone a marked decline, which might have been caused, in part, by climate change. Another well-known North American species, but which also breeds in Central and South America, is **Eastern Meadowlark** *Sturnella magna*. Rosenberg *et al.* (2016) put its global population reduction between 1970 and 2014 at 77%. Combined with other data, this has prompted its listing as Near Threatened.

The seventh species bumped up from Least Concern – **Black Swift** *Cypseloides niger* – is now considered Vulnerable. This addition to the unfortunate ranks of globally threatened birds breeds widely throughout western North America south to Costa Rica, with additional populations in the West Indies. Overall, BirdLife estimates that its global population has reduced by 45% over the past three generations (calculated as being 24 years), which warrants listing as Vulnerable. Reasons for the decline are unclear, although climate change and increased pesticide use, which affects its insect prey, have been suggested as key threats (Rosenberg *et al.* 2016, Chantler *et al.* 2018).

Six species that were already considered globally threatened have witnessed their Red List category worsen in the 2018 update. With only historical records from Argentina and Paraguay, **Dwarf Tinamou** *Taoniscus nanus* is now certain to persist only in Brazil. Here, evidence suggests an 'Area of Occupancy' of under 500 km<sup>2</sup> (which, moreover, is declining in both extent and habitat quality) and a highly fragmented population – justification for elevating the species from Vulnerable to Endangered.

**Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica* joins its fellow aerial insectivore, Black Swift, as Vulnerable. Breeding in North America, this species migrates through Central America to winter in northwestern South America. In each

of two assessments (Rosenberg *et al.* 2016, Sauer *et al.* 2017), the rate of decline in breeding populations exceeds the minimum threshold for listing as Vulnerable (30% over three generations). The finger points to the ongoing loss of potential nesting sites, notably chimneys and old-growth trees, as the main cause.

**Tapajos Hermit** *Phaethornis aethopygus* is endemic to Brazil, where it is known only from the vicinity of the Teles Pires, Tapajós and Xingu rivers, south of the River Amazon (Piacentini *et al.* 2009). Habitat loss within the species's range is predicted to be about 25% in the near future, and the species's population is thought likely to decline by at least 30% in the next 13 years (three generations), which merits its uplisting from Near Threatened to Vulnerable.

Another Brazilian endemic, as its name suggests, is **Brasilia Tapaculo** *Scytalopus novacapitalis*. Worryingly, this species has leapt two categories of threat – from Near Threatened to Endangered. It occurs in swampy gallery forest and dense streamside vegetation in Goiás, Distrito Federal and west Minas Gerais. The species's 'Area of Occupancy' is estimated to be a tiny and severely fragmented 72 km<sup>2</sup>. Even this residual habitat is thought to be declining in both extent and quality owing to pollution, water extraction, trampling by livestock and mining.

Frightening though the tapaculo's double-uplisting is, without doubt the scariest changes in status are those of two species elevated from Endangered to Critically Endangered. Both now lie right in the firing line of global extinction. **Red-fronted Macaw** *Ara rubrogenys* is endemic to Bolivia, being found only in a small area of the eastern Andes. It is thought to have originally inhabited inter-Andean dry forest, but centuries of human activity have comprehensively removed or degraded this habitat. Recent surveys (Tella *et al.* 2013) estimated the total breeding population – across 30-odd sites – to be c.67–136 pairs. In addition, 33 non-breeding pairs and 535 non-breeding individuals were counted. Commenting on the species's Globally Threatened Bird Forums discussion page, José Tella (*in litt.* 2017) noted that there was negligible gene flow between colonies, despite them being separated by just 10–60 km. Each site thus effectively represents a separate subpopulation, meaning that no subpopulation would contain >50 mature individuals. This qualifies the species as Critically Endangered.

The situation of **Bahama Nuthatch** *Sitta insularis* is even more perilous. Symes *et al.* (2017) covered this recent split from Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla*. Habitat destruction and

**5** Neotropical species 'downlisted' to a lower category of threat in the 2018 IUCN Red List update

		2017 IUCN Red List Category	2018 IUCN Red List Category
Black Guan	<i>Chamaepetes unicolor</i>	NT	LC
Bearded Guan	<i>Penelope barbata</i>	VU	NT
White-winged Guan	<i>Penelope albipennis</i>	CR	EN
Gorgeted Wood-Quail	<i>Odontophorus strophium</i>	EN	VU
Hyacinth Visorbearer	<i>Augastes scutatus</i>	NT	LC
Rusty-flanked Crane	<i>Laterallus levraudi</i>	EN	VU
Hispaniolan Trogon	<i>Temnotrogon roseigaster</i>	NT	LC
Kaempfer's Woodpecker	<i>Celeus obrieni</i>	EN	VU
Peruvian Plantcutter	<i>Phytotoma raimondii</i>	EN	VU
Rufous Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus semirufus</i>	EN	VU
Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>	NT	LC
Palm Crow	<i>Corvus palmarum</i>	NT	LC
Munchique Wood-Wren	<i>Henicorhina negreti</i>	CR	VU
La Selle Thrush	<i>Turdus swalesi</i>	EN	VU
Tanager Finch	<i>Oreothraupis arremonops</i>	VU	LC
Zapata Sparrow	<i>Torreornis inexpectata</i>	EN	VU
Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>	NT	LC
Cinereous Warbling-Finch	<i>Microspingus cinereus</i>	VU	LC

**EDITOR'S NOTE: TAXONOMY**

This article focuses on the IUCN Red List for birds, which uses the taxonomy followed by BirdLife International (del Hoyo & Collar 2014, 2016). This does not imply any change to the taxonomic authorities followed by Neotropical Bird Club publications, which remain the South American Classification Committee and the American Ornithological Society.

**6** Cinereous Warbling-Finch *Microspingus cinereus*, Altiplano Leste, Brasilia, Brazil, March 2016 (Rodrigo Conte; [tinyurl.com/rodrigo-conte](https://tinyurl.com/rodrigo-conte)). This species has been 'double-downlisted' from Vulnerable to Least Concern after researchers discovered that it not only persists in degraded habitats, but actually favours them.

degradation, fires, hurricane damage and possibly invasive species were judged to threaten the Bahamas' new endemic species, meaning that in 2016 it joined the Red List as Endangered. In September 2016, Grand Bahama was hit by Category five Hurricane Matthew, which severely damaged the nuthatch's forest habitat (Bahamas National Trust 2016). Subsequent surveys failed to find the species, leading to fears that the hurricane had pushed it to extinction. Fortunately, in May 2018 fieldworkers on two independent surveys confirmed that the nuthatch remained extant (see [tinyurl.com/b-nuthatch](https://tinyurl.com/b-nuthatch)). Although heartening, they only detected a couple of birds, and it seems highly unlikely that the population exceeds 50 individuals, which qualifies the species as Critically Endangered.

**Downlistings**

If downlistings are to be celebrated (Mallon & Jackson 2017), then tears of joy should be shed when a species leaves the threatened categories of the Red List entirely, and is now categorised as Least Concern. This was the case for eight







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Species downlisted following a refined application of the IUCN Red List Criteria when estimating 'Extent of Occurrence' include: **7** Hyacinth Visorbearer *Augastes scutatus*, Conceição do Mato Dentro, Minas Gerais, Brazil, December 2015 (Jarbas Mattos; [flickr.com/photos/jarbas mattos/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jarbas mattos/)); **8** Munchique Wood-Wren *Henicorhina negreti*, Montezuma, Risaralda, Colombia, November 2018 (Claudio Vidal/Far South Expeditions); and **9** Tanager Finch *Oreothraupis arremonops*, Montezuma, Risaralda, Colombia, November 2018 (James Lowen/[flickr.com/photos/jameslowen/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jameslowen/)).



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Neotropical species in 2018. Of the ten remaining downlisted species, one is now Endangered, eight Vulnerable and one Near Threatened.

Look closer and things are not quite as good as they seem, however. For a number of these downlistings, the ‘good news’ stems from a clarification and better appreciation of how the relevant IUCN Red List Criteria should be applied, specifically the estimation of the ‘Extent of Occurrence’ of a species (see [tinyurl.com/IUCN-polygon](https://tinyurl.com/IUCN-polygon)). This effectively measures the spatial spread of areas currently known to be occupied by a species. Areas close together are likely to experience more similar environmental conditions, processes and threats – which could therefore lead to lower extinction risk for species that are spread over a large area compared to those spread over a small area.

It is this refinement in approach that led to the downlisting of 12 of the 18 species in 2018. These were: **Black Guan** *Chamaepetes unicolor*, **Bearded Guan** *Penelope barbata*, **Gorgeted Wood-Quail** *Odontophorus strophium*, **Hyacinth Visorbearer** *Augastes scutatus*, **Hispaniolan Trogon** *Temnotrogon roseigaster*, **Peruvian Plantcutter** *Phytotoma raimondii* (and this in the knowledge of concerns raised in, e.g., Flanagan 2018), **Rufous Flycatcher** *Myiarchus semirufus*, **Palm Crow** *Corvus palmarum*, **Munchique Wood-Wren** *Henicorhina negreti*, **La Selle Thrush** *Turdus swalesi*, **Tanager Finch** *Oreothraupis arremonops* and **Zapata Sparrow** *Torreornis inexpectata*.

A close look at the remaining six downlistings reveals that *all* were due to improved data on (higher) population and/or (wider) distribution, leading to the assessment that the species involved are not as threatened as previously thought. Sadly, not a single Neotropical downlisting in 2019 is thus due to a genuine improvement in conservation status.

A Venezuelan endemic, **Rusty-flanked Crane** *Laterallus levraudi*, has been moved from Endangered to Vulnerable because it is now known from a much larger and more contiguous distribution than previously supposed (Sharpe & Ascanio 2015); moreover, deforestation may have enabled the crane to expand its range into newly created open areas. Nevertheless, its wetland habitat is threatened by drainage and other factors, and neither of the two known subpopulations are thought to exceed 1,000 mature individuals (C. J. Sharpe *in litt.* 2017) – so the species still qualifies as Vulnerable.

**Kaempfer’s Woodpecker** *Celeus obrieni* was rediscovered in 2006 after 80 years without a record. It has now been recorded at several

widely distributed sites across five states in northeast and central Brazil, increasing its (admittedly discontinuous) ‘Extent of Occurrence’ to c.806,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This argued against 95–100% of mature individuals being confined to a single subpopulation, which was how the previous categorisation of Endangered was justified. With this criterion no longer met, this attractive woodpecker was downlisted to Vulnerable.

**Bell’s Vireo** *Vireo bellii* breeds in northern Mexico and central USA and winters south through Central America. Recent research suggests an increasing breeding population in North America, leading to its downlisting from Near Threatened to Least Concern. The same change has been accorded to another migrant passerine, **Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris*, which overwinters in Mexico south through Central America and in parts of the Caribbean. The population decline in this colourful bird is now thought to be somewhere in the region of 2–3% over three generations, which is not sufficient to trigger any of the (near) threatened categories.

Another downlisting due to better knowledge of the species’s status is that of **Cinereous Warbling-Finch** *Microspingus cinereus*. Formerly listed as Vulnerable, the species is endemic to central-southern Brazil. Recent information suggests that not only does it persist in modified habitats such as degraded cerrado and old pastures, but that it actually favours them. As such, rather than declining, it even appears to be extending its range in eastern Minas Gerais state at least. Accordingly it has been ‘double-downlisted’ to Least Concern.

Last but certainly not least, **White-winged Guan** *Penelope albipennis* has been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered. Hidden among small tracts of woodland in northwest Peru, the guan’s population was formerly suspected to be declining, but evidence now shows that it has been stable for at least 25 years. Some 300 individuals were estimated to exist in 2015 (Angulo & Riva 2015). Although threats such as hunting and habitat loss remain, their impact is lower following awareness campaigns. White-winged Guan is a species close to the Neotropical Bird Club’s metaphorical heart: the Club has recently funded two conservation projects to help it (pages 76–77).

## The future

There will be another Red List update in 2019. By the time you read this, proposals for changes to current categorisations



should already be published on BirdLife's Globally Threatened Bird Forums (🔗 [globally-threatened-bird-forums.birdlife.org](http://globally-threatened-bird-forums.birdlife.org), should you need a reminder of where to visit).

Of relevance to this year's update, several additional Neotropical species are subject to the technical refinement relating to the estimation of their 'Extent of Occurrence' (🔗 [tinyurl.com/EOO-BirdLife](http://tinyurl.com/EOO-BirdLife)) and have been proposed for recategorisation. These are: **White-winged Nightjar** *Eleothreptus candicans*, **Black-breasted Puffleg** *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, **Yellow-shouldered Amazon** *Amazona barbadensis*, **Slaty Becard** *Pachyramphus spodiurus*, **Foothill Elaenia** *Myiopagis olallai*, **Choco Vireo** *Vireo masteri*, **Multicoloured Tanager** *Chlorochrysa nitidissima* and **Azure-rumped Tanager** *Tangara cabanisi*. If you have useful information or opinions to contribute on these or other species, please do so.

The 2019 update will be followed, in 2020, by a full reassessment of the status of all the world's birds – four years on from the 2016 Red List update on which we reported in *Neotropical Birding* 21. That might just prompt another article in the pages of this magazine...

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#### JAMES LOWEN

Editor, *Neotropical Birding*, Neotropical Bird Club, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, UK  
✉ [neotropical.birding@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:neotropical.birding@yahoo.co.uk)

#### HANNAH WHEATLEY, CLAUDIA HERMES, IAN BURFIELD & DAVID WEGE

BirdLife International, The David Attenborough Building, Pembroke Street, Cambridge, CB2 3QZ, UK  
✉ [redlistteam@birdlife.org](mailto:redlistteam@birdlife.org)