

Republic of Niger: Endangered Birds

27 May 2022

Introduction

In May 2022, Stamperija issued for the Niger postal authority a sheetlet of four stamps which features Endangered Birds. Here is that sheetlet:



Image source: <https://www.stamperija.eu/product/endangered-birds-5>

The sheetlet depicts the following birds:

- Top-left: Giant Ibis (*Thaumatibis gigantea*)¹ from the family of Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae) which has “Critically Endangered” status;
- Top-right: Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) from the family of Falcons (Falconidae) which has “Endangered” status;

¹ Latin name on Birds of the World is *Pseudibis gigantea*.

- Bottom-left: Golden-cheeked Warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*) from the family of New World Warblers (Parulida) which has “Endangered” status; and
- Bottom-right: Negros Bleeding-heart (*Gallicolumba keayi*) from the family of Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae) which has “Critically Endangered” status.

The two top row birds have previously appeared on stamps: the Giant Ibis, about five times; and the Mauritius Kestrel, about 10 times. The most recent issue of the Mauritius Kestrel was by Mauritius Post, as reported in June 2022’s edition of *Flight* (Vol 36 No 4 page 15).

The two more interesting birds from this set are from the bottom row, which I believe are depicted on stamps for the first time. This is based on my limited search of www.birdtheme.org and also of Stamperija. More about these two birds below.

Golden-cheeked Warbler

The Golden-cheeked Warbler is a native of Texas, United States, where it is known locally as the “Gold Finch of Texas.” The Golden-cheeked Warbler lives and breeds in the juniper-oak forests found in the Edwards Plateau region of Central Texas. In winter, it migrates to the pine-oak forests of Mexico and northern Central America.²

Niger - Golden-cheeked Warbler (27 May 2022)



Why is the Golden-cheeked Warbler endangered? For a start, there are just 21,000 individual birds, which the American Bird Conservancy indicates is on a decreasing trend. The threats to the population include habitat loss, owing to conversion either to housing or agriculture. The other main threat is the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), a species common to North America, which also has the dubious honour of being:

“North America’s best known brood parasite, which lays its eggs in the nests of many different species.”³

² Source: <https://abcbirds.org/bird/golden-cheeked-warbler/>

³ Source: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/bnhcow/cur/introduction>

The Golden-cheeked Warbler is one of the birds whose nests are subject to the brood parasite activities of the Brown-headed Cowbird. What I have not been able to establish is whether the female Brown-headed Cowbird, when laying her own eggs in the nest of (say) the Golden-cheeked Warbler first removes any eggs of the host, or simply lays her own eggs alongside the existing eggs. In any event, the host parent (in this case the Golden-cheeked Warbler) ends up raising the young Cowbirds. Under nests, Birds of the World simply state that the Brown-headed Cowbird “*Does not build its own nest.*”

The Golden-cheeked Warbler feeds almost exclusively on insects and spiders and forages for these in the juniper and deciduous trees where it inhabits; hopping around the branches and taking the insects from the leaves as it moves about. It may also capture the insects in short flights in mid-air.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service first listed the Golden-cheeked Warbler as endangered (under national legislation) back in 1990. The US authorities created the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge in part to conserve the Golden-cheeked warbler, as well as another endangered bird, the Black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*), which has “Near Threatened” status and is also native to Texas. Otherwise, there are no other significant conservation actions for the Golden-cheeked Warbler.⁴

Negros Bleeding-heart

Next is the Negros Bleeding-heart, which is native to The Philippines and in particular, the islands of Negros and Panay, which are home to fewer than 400 birds: the entire population of the Negros Bleeding-heart. No wonder it is “Critically Endangered.”

Niger - Negros Bleeding-heart (27 May 2022)



The Bristol Zoological Society describes The Philippines as:

“both a biodiversity hotspot (a region with significant levels of biodiversity that is threatened with destruction) and a megadiverse country (a nation that harbours majority of Earth’s species and high numbers of endemic species), placing it among the top priorities for global conservation.”⁵

⁴ Source: <https://abcbirds.org/bird/golden-cheeked-warbler/>

⁵ Source: <https://bristolzoo.org.uk/save-wildlife/conservation-and-research/negros-bleeding-heart-dove-project>

The Negros Bleeding-heart lives in primary and secondary forest and usually is found on the forest floor, where it wanders searching for food. Research suggests that its diet consists of invertebrates found on the ground; it may also consume fruits from trees.⁶

On the islands of Negros and Panay, the Bristol Zoological Society (BZS) suggests that there is a risk of total deforestation in the next few decades, for two reasons: population growth and conversion of forests into agricultural land. The potential habitat loss also threatens the “Endangered” Visayan Hornbill (*Penelopides panini*).⁷ Birds of the World reports that in 1988, only 4 per cent of the original forest remained on the island of Negros; and 8 per cent on Panay.⁸

The BZS’s own conservation programme, working with local communities, consists of the following:

- Encouraging reforestation to restore habitat;
- Monitoring, over the longer-term, the local population growth;
- Conservation breeding;
- Engage forest wardens to report illegal activities and sponsor human-wildlife coexistence;
- Promoting sustainable livelihoods, as an alternative to forest destruction and conversion to agriculture or housing;
- Engagement with public authorities, with the aim of creating protected areas for the threatened wildlife, including the Negros Bleeding-heart.⁹

There are other partners working alongside the BZS to protect the existence of the Negros Bleeding-heart and other threatened wildlife, as is highlighted on the website of the Asian Species Action Group (ASAP).¹⁰

Other Endangered Species

The Niger “Endangered Birds” issue also included a single stamp sheetlet that featured on the stamp the New Zealand “Critically Endangered” Kakapo (*Strigops habroptila*), which has featured on a number of stamps already, so I will not dwell on it here.¹¹

The bird in the background is the Sulu Hornbill (*Anthracoceros montani*) which can be found in The Philippines, on one, possibly two islands of that country (2-5 locations). Research estimates the

⁶ Source: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/nebhea1/cur/introduction>

⁷ The Visayan Hornbill appears as a bird in the background on the 2021 issue from Togo: <https://stampera.eu/product/endangered-species-115>

⁸ Source: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/nebhea1/cur/introduction> also from Birdlife International factsheet dated 21/04/2015.

⁹ Source: <https://bristolzoo.org.uk/cmsassets/documents/Save-Wildlife/BZS-Negros-Bleeding-Heart-Dove-Conservation-Strategy.pdf>

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.speciesonthebrink.org/species/negros-bleeding-heart/>

¹¹ There is a Stamperija (Togo) issue from 2020 that illustrates this bird: <https://stampera.eu/product/rare-birds-25>

population to be fewer than 50 adult mature individuals. In this instance, this bird is “on the road to extinction” as is indicated on the sheet.

Niger – Endangered Birds (27 May 2022)



Image source: <https://stampera.eu/product/endangered-birds-4>