



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

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## **Rota Bridled White-eye Receives Endangered Species Status**

The Rota bridled white-eye – a small forest bird with a distinctive ring of white feathers around its eyes – was designated an endangered species today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Found in the Mariana archipelago, the Rota bridled white-eye exists only on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

“The Rota bridled white-eye is found nowhere else in the world and represents part of Rota’s natural heritage,” said David B. Allen, Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region. “We welcome the opportunity to work closely with the people of Rota to ensure the bird’s survival.”

“Saving the rare bird from extinction is both a responsibility and an opportunity,” Allen said. “We will work cooperatively with all interested parties and nurture strong partnerships with private landowners to ensure that future generations can enjoy the incredible beauty of the Rota bridled white-eye and its habitat.”

The estimated population of the Rota bridled white-eye has declined dramatically since the early 1980s, when there were nearly 11,000 birds. Today, fewer than 1,100 birds are thought to remain on Rota – a 90 percent decline. Once numerous and found at low elevations on the island, current Rota bridled white-eye populations are concentrated in four areas of the island on limestone formations containing mature wet forest above 650 feet in elevation.

The Rota bridled white-eye is a small (approximately 4 inches in size) yellowish bird with a yellow-orange bill, legs, and feet. Average weight of the bird is about one-third of an ounce. The species feeds primarily on insects and often is found in small flocks of five to seven birds. Its closest relatives are the Guam bridled white-eye, which is believed to be extinct, and the Saipan bridled white-eye, which is relatively abundant on Saipan, Tinian, and Aguiguan.

Exact causes for the sharp decline in Rota bridled white-eye populations are unknown. Possible factors contributing to the decline include degradation or loss of habitat due to development, agricultural activities, and naturally occurring events such as typhoons; predation by rats and black drongos (an introduced bird species from Taiwan); and use of pesticides.

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The Service will designate critical habitat for the species in the future. The public will have the opportunity to participate in the process of designating critical habitat and developing a recovery plan for the species.

The Rota bridled white-eye was proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act in October 2001 but budget shortfalls delayed a final listing decision. For the past few years, most of the Service's listing budgets have been used to comply with court orders and settlement agreements, mostly involving the designation of critical habitat for species already listed under the Act. Following a settlement agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity, the Service committed to take final action on the proposal to list the Rota bridled white-eye by January 15.

The final rule was published in the *Federal Register* on January 22. Copies of the final rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://pacificislands.fws.gov>. Copies are also available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Honolulu at 808-792-9400.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.