Response to BirdLife: proposed Red List status change for Sierra Leone Prinia *Schistolais leontica*

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The following comments are a response to the proposal (https://forums.birdlife.org/2026-1-sierra-leone-prinia-schistolais-leontica/) to change the Red List status of Sierra Leone Prinia from Endangered to Near Threatened. The section titles follow the titles in the BirdLife Globally Threatened Bird Forum proposal

Geographic range

There is reference to eBird records of 5 birds at Outamba Kilimi National Park (OKNP) in 2008-09 and it is noted that the exact location is not known and that there are no further records. We can update these comments, having earlier contacted the author of the two observations, Mike Andersen (University of New Mexico). He provided dates (23 and 25 April 2009) and coordinates from which we have calculated the elevation of his two observations (using the elevatr package in R) to be 87m and 92m asl. One of the locations was revisited by two of us (MS and PR) in 2019 and we noted one bird, which responded to playback. Mike Andersen made the two observations during 12 days of field work. We therefore suggest that the species is extant at OKNP and occurs at lower altitudes than previously recorded, but agree that more surveys are needed to assess its distribution there.

A paper modelling the distribution of Sierra Leone Prinia (du Jonchay *et al.* 2017) is referenced to suggest that the species may occur more widely. The reference uses MAXENT as the modelling tool, which can be inaccurate (see e.g. Yackulic, C.B. et al. 2013. Presence-only modelling using MAXENT: when can we trust the inferences? Methods in Ecology and Evolution. 4. 236-243). MAXENT uses presence-only data and analysis often, as in this case, has biased data with no structured sampling, as the available data from several surveys over small areas specifically to detect the species were, as what was available, used. Absence data was not included in the modelling. The model concluded that altitude and slope were the main predictors of the species' presence, with a weaker association with distance from forest and consequently used these, with no more detailed consideration of habitat type, in producing the predictive map on which BirdLife bases the suggestion that the species may be more widespread than previously thought. We suggest that this is premature and that presence-absence modelling with more habitat variables is necessary. The c40 birds from 19 sites in Guinea around Dalaba (Lenrume 2024) are said to constitute "numerous records" and also a rationale for the species occurring more widely, but come from an area where the species had previously been reported (Barlow et al. 2006).

Rationale for proposed change

13 of the 14 sites tabulated in Lenrume 2014 are described as both degraded and forest edge, whilst BirdLife refers just to "disturbed habitat" in suggesting that suitable habitat may be widespread. A measure of forest edge rather than simply disturbed habitat would be necessary in predicting a wider distribution.

The evidence from OKNP above does extend the altitudinal range of the species to lower altitudes.

The assumptions that the species may be more widespread and that the habitat requirements and hence rate of loss of habitat are not linked to forest loss are perhaps premature, as dependent only on the very interesting data from around Dalaba, a known area of occurrence since 2006, extrapolated with the support of the questionable MAXENT model.

General request

Under Annex 2 Criterion C, if the population has previously been estimated, the new data (Lenrume 2024) could be used for a new estimate, whereas the lack of an estimate due to the assumption that the species may be more widespread due to the MAXENT model is perhaps given too much weight in suggesting that an estimate is now impossible and that therefore Criterion C cannot apply. .

Specific questions

There are no studies of dispersal capacity for this largely unstudied species.

Our overall conclusion is that the change of status to Near Threatened depends on too much weight being given to the MAXENT model and Lenrume data, from which it is assumed that a population estimate is now impossible. All of this may be true, but requires more data from other areas that may be similar to Dalaba and structured sampling. Pending this data, the species should maintain its Endangered status or be reduced to Vulnerable, but not dropped to Near Threatened..