

WHERE TO SEE

An accessible site for Vietnam's Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Garrulax konkakinhensis*

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The Vulnerable Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Garrulax konkakinhensis* (BirdLife International 2012), endemic to central Annam, was discovered in 1999 by J. C. Eames (Eames 2001, Eames & Eames 2001). It was found between 1,600 and 1,700 m on Mt Kon Ka Kinh, Kon Ka Kinh National Park, Gia Lai province. Subsequently it has been seen at three sites in Kon Tum province, but there are government-imposed access restrictions at two of these: Dak Roong State Forest Enterprise (recorded at about 1,200 m) and Mt Ngoc Boc in Kon Plong State Forest Enterprise (recorded between 1,350 and 1,610 m). The third site is on Highway 24 (H24) between km 68 and 69 (14.63°N 108.38°E), where on 20 March 2002 Clide Carter saw one bird (CC pers. comm.), but attempts by others to find the species here were unsuccessful until SPM, DPE and FAA saw one in April 2010, using CC's recording—note this forest patch is small, less than 1 km in length, and birding is less rewarding than on Mang Canh plateau (see below).

We used GoogleEarth to find potential Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush sites with legal road access. Four areas above 1,200 m, near sites in Kon Tum province with past records of the species, were identified and were visited on 21–24 April 2010. Helped by CC's recordings, we found four Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush territories on the Mang Canh plateau at 1,200–1,300 m and sound recordings (now available on www.xeno-canto.org) were made. The other areas were either inaccessible or unproductive. Other birders visited this site on 9–11 May 2010, easily found the species and obtained good images; good success at this location has continued. The plateau is in Kon Plong State Forest near the town of Mang Den—about 50 km east of Kon Tum city on H24; Mang Den has inexpensive accommodation and restaurants. To reach the site, drive east on H24 from Mang Den for a few km and turn left on to H676 (a concrete road through Kon Plong State Forest Enterprise providing legal access to roadside forest on the plateau)—check the km posts to ensure that you are on the right road. Forest cover is patchy on H676 until Mang Canh village, then there is evergreen forest by the road. At km 15, at the top of a hill, the road bears right and a large bare area is a good parking place—RC saw five Chestnut-eared Laughingthrushes within 400 m of here on 9 May 2010. A good area

to check is around the large dead trees lying on the ground at the forest edge on the left side (14.67°N 108.26°E). Two tracks lead into the forest from the far side of the open area: the right-hand one follows powerlines and we found a territory about 100 m along it (14.67°N 108.25°E) where a bird was feeding in the leaf-litter. RC found a territory about 400 m down the left-hand track. Back on H676, RC found a territory in roadside vegetation about 1.5 km from the parking area, and we found another on a concrete road that forks to the left about 3 km from the parking spot (14.70°N 108.25°E)—a sign here on the right of the road indicated that a new hydropower dam was under construction, and in May 2011 SPM found another territory behind this sign.

We found Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush common on the Mang Canh plateau above 1,200 m in evergreen forest along H676 and responsive

Plate 1. Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Garrulax konkakinhensis*, Mang Canh Plateau, Mang Den, Annam, Vietnam, 10 May 2010.



to playback in the early morning and evening—although we urge birders to use this technique sparingly. RC also reported a response to a recording of Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*, which had attracted a mixed-species foraging flock. Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush habitat also appears to exist on H669, which runs north and south from H24, 17 km east of H676. In 2010, birding was frustrating to the south due to recent road widening, and was impossible to the north due to ongoing construction work, but trails into forest off H669 on the south side are likely to be productive and the north side is worth investigating in the future. The Mang Canh plateau holds other interesting species including Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*, Blue Pitta *Pitta cyanea* (heard), Austen's Brown Hornbill *Anorrhinus austeni*, Indochinese Green Magpie *Cissa hypoleuca*, Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea* race *gayetti*, Short-tailed Scimitar-babbler *Jabouilleia danjoui*, Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*, Black-hooded Laughingthrush *Garrulax milleti* race *sweeti*, Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis* and Yellow-billed Nuthatch *Sitta solangiae*.

The new sightings were all made in a relatively short stretch of roadside forest in an active logging concession where hydropower dam construction

Plate 2. Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Garrulax konkakinhensis*, Mang Canh plateau, Mang Den, Annam, Vietnam, 2 August 2010.



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is ongoing. Whilst it is heartening that Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush and other species persist in these logged forests, demonstrating their conservation value (Edwards *et al.* 2010), work on H676 is ongoing and there is concurrent forest clearance for agriculture and smallholdings. The Mang Canh plateau is not a protected area and we suggest it is an urgent conservation priority. Furthermore, the plateau lies between the protected Ngoc Linh and Kon Ka Kinh National Parks, and its protection would help maintain a corridor between them. We also note that Eames (2001) reported three Golden-winged Laughingthrush *G. ngoclinhensis* at 1,480 m on Mt Ngoc Boc in January 2001. Although roadside forest on H676 reaches only 1,320 m and speculative playback by SPM in May 2011 was not productive, GoogleEarth suggests that forest at an elevation suiting this species lies only 3 km from the road and this warrants investigation if access can be obtained.

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Editors' note: This species has now been reported in Xe Sap, Laos (T. Gray *in litt.* 2012).