



Global Re-introduction Perspectives: 2016

Case-studies from around the globe

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IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group (RSG)



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iii. Morelos minnow, Mexico @ Topiltzin Contreras-MacBeath
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v. Tasmanian Devil, Maria Island, Tasmania @ Simon DeSalis
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Re-introduction of the black-winged starling in Gunung Halimun Salak National Park, West Java, Indonesia

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Introduction

The black-winged starling (*Sturnus melanopterus*) is currently listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List due to intensive trapping for the illegal cage-bird trade. Formerly really common in open land areas, the species faced a dramatic decline until few individuals remain in localised areas (Birdlife International, 2012). It is also listed as protected species under the Indonesian law. To counteract the oncoming extinction of the species, Cikananga Conservation Breeding Centre (CCBC), situated in West Java, breeds the West Javan subspecies (*S. m. melanopterus*) for re-introduction purposes since 2007. On 23rd April 2013, 40 Black-winged Starlings were released in Gunung Halimun Salak National Park, one of the biggest National Parks of West Java. The release site is situated within a gold mine which recreates suitable habitat for endemic species. Since the release, intensive monitoring was performed to judge on the ability of captive-bred birds to cope with a wild environment and know better about the ecology of this quite unknown species. This re-introduction program is the first of its kind in Java since no release from captive-bred individuals happened before on this island.



Released starling © Anais Tritto

Goals

- Goal 1: High survival rate of the re-introduced population with an adequate demography of the population, necessary for normal social interactions and mating behaviors.
- Goal 2: Encourage the released population to be self-sustainable through breeding.
- Goal 3: Get valuable information on the ecology of the black-winged

starling that would increase knowledge on the species and provide guidelines for future releases.

- Goal 4: Develop a strong education program with local people to prevent bird-catching.

Success Indicators

- Indicator 1: Survival of most released individuals with adequate behaviour (feeding, roosting & nesting).
- Indicator 2: Successful fledging juveniles from supplied nest boxes or natural nests.
- Indicator 3: Data on various ecology aspects, such as feeding/roosting preferences, predator avoidance and breeding seasons.
- Indicator 4: Bird-catching evidences limited and involvement of local people in the success of the program.

Project Summary

Feasibility: The release site is situated within the Gunung Halimun Salak National Park in West Java and especially in a gold mine area, managed by an Indonesian company. The release site is around 95 ha and is composed of grasslands, villages and rice plantations surrounded by secondary and productive forests. The area was chosen depending on the black-winged starling ecology. Indeed, this species is an open-land bird, using mainly plantations and grasslands to forage for insects. Unlike the Javan munia (*Lonchura leucogastroides*) which is intensively trapped or chased, local people could find benefit from this species as they can use it as insect-regulator for the crops.

Implementation: In October 2012, the birds were transferred to the habituation cage (12 m x 5 m x 3 m) within the release site from the captive breeding centre after they received health check (screening for Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease) and appropriate deworming treatment. They were chosen depending on their genetics (over-represented in captivity & unrelated) and demography to get a balanced sex-ratio. The birds were supposed to stay 2 months in the habituation cage but, due to a problem of organization between the stakeholders (gold mine, National Park & CCBC), the birds were released 6 months after they arrived on the site and on 23rd April 2013, the birds were soft-released. The cage stayed opened for the next month after release where the birds could find a secure place for roosting, the cage being closed at night. They also received a food supply for 1 month, composed of the original diet they received in captivity (papayas, bananas & dry pellets). Moreover, 25 predator-proof nest boxes were provided in the surroundings of the release site to offer them suitable nesting sites.

Post-release monitoring: The birds were monitored by visual observation and individually identified by their colour rings. Out of 40 birds released, 20 individuals could still be observed in the release site after 6 months (October 2013), using mainly the plantations surrounding the village, foraging for insects such as prey mantis, caterpillars and grasshoppers (the identification of insect species is in progress). From November 2013, only 6 birds could be observed in the area, mainly due to a release of a confiscated crested-serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*).



Starling release site © Fitryana April Hosiana

This release, without prior communication between the different stakeholders could be one of the reasons why the birds dispersed, as long as a decrease in the food availability (absence of mature fruits from the umbrella trees (*Maesopsis eminii*)). It is likely that these events forced the birds to disperse in an area where no educational awareness was performed on local communities and which led to intensive catching (Tritto, 2014).

The breeding season started in March 2014 and, to date (September 2014), is still running with four juveniles that successfully fledged out of the supplemental nest boxes from two different pairs. The captive-bred parents showed appropriate breeding behaviors, from nest building to the rearing of the chicks. In July 2014, bird catching resulted in one juvenile capture at the release site, but with the help of local people who are now devoted to the program and proud to have this species on their lands, the theft was aborted and the bird released. To prevent any more bird catching in the area, three security guards, from the village, were hired to protect the bird population and the nest boxes. The current population (September 2014) is now eight birds and new release will be implemented in the near future.

Major difficulties faced

- The food supply stopped quickly due to a problem of organisation between all the stakeholders which led to a high dispersion of the birds.
- Most of the birds dispersed to an unknown location, possibly in a place where no awareness program was implemented and were caught.
- The birds showed a wilder behavior along the year which led to difficulties to individually recognize and track them.
- Bird-catching evidences were noted on the site, some of them orientated to the black-winged starlings. This difficulty was counteracted by hiring security guards from the local community.

Major lessons learned

- Better communication and planning is needed between all the different stakeholders.
- The birds are able to cope with a wild environment as long as the interaction with human is kept to a minimum.

- By involving local people in the program (hiring local security guards, doing awareness and activities with the children & developing the community), bird catching stopped since all the villagers are proud to have this species and protect it from outsiders.

Success of project

Highly Successful	Successful	Partially Successful	Failure
		√	

Reason(s) for success/failure:

- Some of the birds settled in the release site and presented adequate behaviors.
- Four juveniles successfully fledged 1 year after the initial release.
- The education awareness program should have started a long-time before the initial release and on a larger scope to prevent bird catching and involve local people from the start.
- The education awareness program was only performed by students and did not show any regularity.
- Sufficient staff was not present on the site to monitor and to do education with the local people. Recently, the conservation team was increased with a full-time field biologist and full-time education officer, both Indonesian, who could continue implementing the action plan.

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