

## Saipan Tribune

### Critical habitat designated for Rota bird



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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated a total of 3,958 acres of land as critical habitat for the endangered Rota bridled white-eye on the island of Rota.

In a final ruling released Tuesday, the designation consists of 3,700 acres of government land under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth and 258 acres of private land.

The agency said that the Rota bridled white-eye critical habitat was determined by using "the best" scientific and commercial data available.

Information included peer-reviewed scientific publications, Service listing and recovery documents, unpublished reports from the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife, aerial photographs and satellite imagery, and personal communications with local scientists and resource managers. All comments were considered in the final designation of critical habitat.

A lawsuit was filed against the Department of the Interior and the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity on May 20, 2004, challenging the decision not to propose critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye.

This critical habitat designation fulfills a Sept. 14, 2004, settlement agreement stating that a critical habitat proposal must be submitted by Sept. 7, 2005, to the Federal Register for publication.

Critical habitat identifies specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations.

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. In 1982, there were approximately 10,000 Rota bridled white-eyes. Currently, the species consists of approximately 1,000 birds restricted to forests above 490 feet (150 meters) elevation in the Sabana region of Rota.

The final rule to designate critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye was published Tuesday in the Federal Register and will take effect in 30 days. The final rule, which contains maps of specific critical habitat locations, is available at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/06-7583.pdf>. Copies may also be obtained by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808 792 9400. (PR)