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30,000 people in Pakistan's Palas Valley face the Himalayan winter without shelter as a result of the October earthquake. BirdLife is collecting donations to purchase desperately needed relief goods. Please help.

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## Bahama Nuthatch shaken not stirred

14-02-2005

New research has suggested that the form of Brown-

headed Nuthatch found on Grand Bahama could be a distinct species.

Currently three subspecies of Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla* are recognized. These include two continental forms in the southeastern United States – *S. p. pusilla* occupying most of the range, and *S. p. caniceps* confined to the Florida peninsula and extreme southern Georgia.

The only form found away from the US mainland *S. p. insularis* is restricted to Grand Bahama Island. Interestingly this form was first described by James Bond, the noted ornithologist of the West Indies who gave his name to Ian Fleming's famous spy.

The new research published in the Bahamas Journal of Science, suggests that differences particularly in call and bill size between the Bahamian form and its mainland counterparts, mean that this rare Caribbean resident should be treated as a new species, the Bahama Nuthatch *S. insularis*.

**"The nuthatch is potentially only the Bahamas' fourth endemic, so we want to move quickly to protect it."**

—Eric Carey, Bahamas National Trust

"The nuthatch is potentially only the Bahamas' fourth endemic, so we want to move quickly to protect it. Our Important Bird Area programme, part of BirdLife's Caribbean-wide initiative, provides us with a mechanism to immediately assign high conservation priority to the sites on Grand Bahama where this



Gary Slater/Ecostudies Institute  
**Although currently treated as a race of Brown-headed Nuthatch, new research suggests that the Bahamas form could be a separate species, the Bahama Nuthatch *Sitta insularis***  
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endangered bird still occurs," said Eric Carey of the Bahamas National Trust (BirdLife in the Bahamas).

Whatever the taxonomic consensus turns out to be, what is clear is that the nuthatch is under threat. At best its population is estimated to be around 1,800 individuals, found only in Caribbean Pine *Pinus caribaea*, one of the most critically threatened habitats in the West Indies. Continued logging and development poses a very real threat to the nuthatch, as well as to other rare Bahamian wildlife. The most important next step for the future of the nuthatch is the formal protection of its habitat.

*The fieldwork for this project was kindly funded by Grand Bahama Power Company.*

### Related Links

- [Grand Bahama's Brown-headed Nuthatch: A Distinct and Endangered Species \(PDF, 368 KB\)](#)

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