CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT AND LISTING PRIORITY ASSIGNMENT FORM

SCIENTIFIC NAME: Porzana tabuensis

COMMON NAME: spotless crake (American Samoa pop.)

LEAD REGION: 1

INFORMATION CURRENT AS OF: 02/14/2003

STATUS/ACTION (Check all that apply):
____ New candidate
_X__ Continuing candidate
_X_ Non-petitioned
___ Petitioned - Date petition received: _____
__ 90-day positive - FR date: _____
__ 12-month warranted but precluded - FR date: _____
__ Is the petition requesting a reclassification of a listed species?
___ Listing priority change
Former LP: ___
New LP: ___
Latest Date species first became a Candidate: _____
___ Candidate removal: Former LP: ___ (Check only one reason)
___ A - Taxon more abundant or widespread than previously believed or not subject to a degree of threats sufficient to warrant issuance of a proposed listing or continuance of candidate status.
___ F - Range is no longer a U.S. territory.
___ M - Taxon mistakenly included in past notice of review.
___ N - Taxon may not meet the Act=s definition of Aspecies.@
___ X - Taxon believed to be extinct.

ANIMAL/PLANT GROUP AND FAMILY: Birds, Rallidae

HISTORICAL STATES/TERRITORIES/COUNTRIES OF OCCURRENCE: American Samoa (Tau)

CURRENT STATES/ COUNTIES/TERRITORIES/COUNTRIES OF OCCURRENCE: American Samoa (Tau)

LEAD REGION CONTACT (Name, phone number): Scott McCarthy, 503-231-6131

LEAD FIELD OFFICE CONTACT (Office, name, phone number): Pacific Islands (Ecological Services), Marilet A. Zablan, 808-541-3441

BIOLOGICAL INFORMATION (Describe habitat, historic vs. current range, historic vs. current population estimates (# populations, #individuals/population), etc.):

The spotless crake is found in the Philippines, Australia, Fiji, Tonga, Society Islands, Marquesas, Western Samoa, and American Samoa, and prefers rank vegetation near water (Watling 1982). Until 2001, all sightings of this species in American Samoa were from the island of Ta=u in marshy habitat or tall, moist, grassy swales. A series of 10 specimens was collected from Ta=u in 1923 during the Whitney South Sea Expedition (Murphy 1924; Banks 1984). This species was not found during surveys in 1976 (Amerson et al. 1982), and was reported as extirpated on Ta=u (Muse and Muse 1984), but a maximum of three individuals was found on Ta=u from 1985-1987 (Engbring and Engilis 1988; Engbring and Ramsey 1989). The spotless crake was recently rediscovered on the summit of Ta=u, at roughly 945 meters (m) (3,100 feet (ft)) (M. Rauzon, pers. comm., 2001). On July 20, 2001, two birds were heard and seen in dense vegetation near the summit field camp. On December 5, 2001, two birds, presumed to be a different pair, were heard at the end of a trail extension cut to survey seabirds on the summit. Trapping on the summit revealed the presence of at least one species of rat (Rattus norvegicus).

The American Samoa population of spotless crakes is threatened by the low number of individuals, catastrophes such as hurricanes, and predation by non-native mammals. The population in American Samoa is extremely small; at present only four individuals are known to exist. This is the only population of this species under U.S. jurisdiction. The status of populations in other areas is not known.

THREATS (Describe threats in terms of the five factors in section 4 of the ESA providing specific, substantive information. If this is a removal of a species from candidate status or a change in listing priority, explain reasons for change):

A. The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range.

Loss of wetland habitat is a primary threat to this species, and this loss probably has contributed to the species= extirpation from lowland habitats where it was formerly recorded. Almost all wetlands have been lost or converted to taro fields. Clearing of land for agriculture severely alters the already limited habitat. The habitat where the species occurs today is afforded some protection from human disturbance by its remote location and its status as part of the National Park of American Samoa. Hurricanes, however, may modify this and other, already limited crake habitat.

B. Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes.

Overutilization is not considered a threat. The species is not known to be taken for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes.

C. Disease or predation.

Predation by rats likely poses a significant threat for this small, ground-nesting bird. At least one species of rat co-occurs with the crake on the summit of Ta=u, and rats are well known to

prey on bird eggs, nestlings, and sometimes on adult birds.

D. The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

Although this species presently occurs in a National Park, it is not protected under any local, State, or Federal regulations/laws. While American Samoa has some restrictions on modifying wetlands, these restrictions are rarely applied in cases of development for subsistence-type living, which is largely the case where the remaining lowland habitat for this species is found (Dr. Joshua Seamon, pers. comm., 1999); consequently habitat loss continues to occur.

E. Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

The low number of individuals in this population (<20) places this species at great risk of extinction from inbreeding and stochastic events such as hurricanes. Hurricanes may cause the direct and indirect mortality of some birds, as well as modify the already limited habitat.

FOR RECYCLED PETITIONS:

a. Is listing still warranted? ___
b. To date, has publication of a proposal to list been precluded by other higher priority listing actions? ___
c. Is a proposal to list the species as threatened or endangered in preparation? ___
d. If the answer to c. above is no, provide an explanation of why the action is still precluded.

LAND OWNERSHIP (Estimate proportion Federal/state/local government/private, identify non-private owners): The summit of Ta=u Island, where the birds presently occur, is administered by the National Park Service. Unoccupied lowland habitat on Ta=u is located on private lands.

PRELISTING (Describe status of conservation agreements or other conservation activities):

Two expeditions to survey the biota on the summit of Ta=u were conducted in 2001. These surveys were funded by the University of Hawaii Cooperative Park Studies Unit and carried out by a private contractor and NPS personnel. The American Samoa Government has conducted some surveys of likely lowland habitat on Ta=u.

REFERENCES (Identify primary sources of information (e.g., status reports, petitions, journal publications, unpublished data from species experts) using formal citation format):

Amerson, A.B., Jr., W.A. Whistler, and T.D. Schwaner. 1982. Wildlife and wildlife habitat of American Samoa. II. Accounts of flora and Fauna. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 151 pp.

Banks, R.C. 1984. Bird specimens from American Samoa. Pacific Science 38:150-169.

Engbring, J., and A.E. Engilis. 1988. Rediscovery of the Sooty Rail (Porzana tabuensis) in American Samoa. Auk 105:391.

Engbring, J., and F.L. Ramsey. 1989. A 1986 survey of the forest birds of American Samoa. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 145 pp.

Murphy, R.C. 1924. Birds collected during the Whitney South Sea Expedition. II. American Museum Novitates 124:1-13.

Muse, C., and S. Muse. 1982. The birds and birdlore of Samoa. Pioneer Press, Walla Walla, Washington. 156 pp.

Rauzon, M. Marine Endeavors/CPSU, August and December 2001 pers. comm. with Holly Freifeld, FWS, Honolulu.

Seamon, J. American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources, February 1999, pers. comm. with Marilet A. Zablan, FWS, Honolulu.

Watling, D. 1982. Birds of Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. Millwood Press, Wellington, New Zealand. 176 pp.

LISTING PRIORITY (* after number)

THREAT

Magnitude	Immediacy	Taxonomy	Priority
High	Imminent	Monotypic genus	1
		Species	2
		Subspecies/population	3
	Non-imminent	Monotypic genus	4
		Species	5
		Subspecies/population	6 *
Moderate to Low	Imminent	Monotypic genus	7
		Species	8
		Subspecies/population	9
	Non-imminent	Monotypic genus	10
		Species	11
		Subspecies/population	12

Rationale for listing priority number:

Magnitude:

Imminence:

APPROVAL/CONCURRENCE: Lead Regions must obtain written concurrence from all other Regions within the range of the species before recommending changes to the candidate list, including listing priority changes; the Regional Director must approve all such recommendations. The Director must concur on all additions of species to the candidate list, removal of candidates, and listing priority changes.

Approve: Rowan Gould March 6, 2003
Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service Date

Concur: _____ _____
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service Date

Do not concur:_____ _____
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service Date

Director's Remarks:

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Date of annual review: February 2003
Conducted by:_____

Comments:

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