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Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis* in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem

In 2005, I documented the presence of a previously unknown population of Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis* in Tanzania's northeast Serengeti in the Klein's Camp area (Kilpin 2006). The area where the birds were found, and where they are regarded as being resident throughout the year, is adjacent to the formal Serengeti National Park (SNP), where much more extensive areas of apparently suitable habitat are found. As a result of the presence of such suitable habitat, I had been hoping to locate more birds inside the national park and perhaps even further north into the Masai Mara.

In due course, on the evening of 27 February 2007 as I was on the Lobo Road just 5.1 km from the exit of the SNP at Klein's Gate, I heard the characteristic 'chop-chop-chop' call of the Swamp Nightjar. It was getting dark and I was unable to see the bird, but noted the habitat: a gently sloping area leading

down to the drainage line, dominated by *Themeda triandra*. This is very similar to the habitat at Klein's Camp itself.

On 13 September 2007, a 'mystery nightjar' was photographed by Graeme Hulley (Fig. 1) in the Masai Mara National Reserve (MMNR), just southeast of Oloololo Gate. The photograph was taken in shrubby grassland about 1 km from a marshy area. This bird clearly shows the diagnostic features of a Swamp Nightjar. The distinctive buffy-white supercilium and dark 'cheek', uniform mottled plumage and part of the white outer retrices can easily be seen.



Figure 1: Swamp Nightjar, Masai Mara National Reserve.
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In addition to the more comprehensive dataset in the Klein's Camp area (Kilpin 2006), these two additional records combined with the extensive tracts of apparently suitable habitat, suggest that the Swamp Nightjar is likely to be resident, but overlooked until now. Considering that the species is typically nocturnal and that night safaris are not permitted in the SNP or the MMNR, it is not surprising that it has gone undetected.

Notwithstanding the fact that Swamp Nightjar is categorised as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International 2008), its local status in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem deserves further investigation. This could be relatively easily achieved by conducting nocturnal transects.

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