Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor cabanisi* in Tanzania: a breeding record in a traditional beehive

On 27 December 2013, between the Tarangire National Park entrance and Makuyuni, Tanzania, at 3°33´S, 36°04´E, altitude 1073 m, I stopped at 11:00 to photograph an acacia tree with nine traditional beehives in it. To my amazement I saw two Abyssinian Scimitarbills *Rhinopomastus minor* entering a hole on the bottom of one of the beehives. Each had food in its bill, apparently insects or larvae. I watched for about ten minutes during which each bird separately made three to four visits to the beehive and entered it. Two days later both birds were again there and the same behaviour was noted. I recorded that two beehives had holes in the bottom of them. That with the nest was approximately 5 m above the ground, its dimensions approximately 90 cm x 40 cm x 35 cm. The opening to the nest on the lower surface of the beehive was 4 cm in diameter. On 7 February 2014 I passed the site again. The birds had gone but I was informed by local Maasai youths that bees had already left that tree and moved a few kilometres away in September 2013. During my three visits I saw no bees and no other species of birds on the tree.

In Tanzania, Abyssinian Scimitarbill of the race *cabanisi* is a sometimes common resident of open bushed and wooded habitats in lower rainfall areas east of Lake Victoria (Britton 1980, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). There are scanty breeding records but Brown & Britton (1980) indicate a strong preference for the dry season, possibly peaking in December in Region D. The species is a monogamous, solitary nester. The typical nest is in a natural hole or fissure, or a hole excavated by another species, in a dead or living tree, 0.5–2 m above ground (Fry 1988). There is a record of parasitisation by Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* (Madge & Cunningham van Someren 1975).

The Abyssinian Scimitarbill is described as insectivorous, eating mostly adults and larvae of insects: beetle larvae, caterpillars, ants, flies and wasps; occasionally seeds and berries (Fry *op. cit.*). It does not eat honey and yet is parasitized by the Greater Honeyguide, which does eat honey. The fact that our birds were nesting in an unused beehive raises interesting questions about the relationship of the species to the Greater Honeyguide and to bees.

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