

The breeding of Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor* and Red-throated Tit *Parus fringillinus* in nest boxes in the central Rift Valley of Kenya

The Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor* is an uncommon resident of thorn scrub in low altitude areas, largely below 1400 m (Zimmerman *et al* 1996). During June-July 2009, a pair successfully raised three young in a nest box at Green Park Estate, Eburru, near Naivasha (0°40'S 36°12'E, 2150 m). However, between October

2009 and July 2012, when the pair laid a total of thirty three eggs (11 clutches of 3 eggs each), their success rate was zero, due to every clutch being targeted by Greater Honeyguides *Indicator indicator*, and on two occasions two honeyguide eggs were found in the nest box used by the scimitarbills. As a result, during this three year period, no scimitarbills hatched, while from twelve honeyguide eggs seven young successfully fledged, though on four occasions all eggs from the nest box were ejected by the scimitarbills so that four of the eleven clutches failed completely. Later, between August 2012 and September 2014, four scimitarbill clutches (12 eggs) were laid without any honeyguide parasitism, and a total of eleven young was successfully fledged.

The Red-throated Tit *Parus fringillinus* is an East African endemic species largely confined to acacia country throughout Masailand in southern Kenya and Tanzania, with little or no breeding data available since that recorded in Brown & Britton (1980). With Britton (1980), Zimmerman *et al* (1996) and Fry & Keith (2000) all giving altitudinal limits of 1000–1600 m, it is worth noting that a pair has bred successfully in nest boxes at Green Park Estate, Eburru, near Naivasha at an altitude of over 2100 m. The area is close to the northernmost limits of the known range, but the site at Green Park has clearly become highly favoured and successful for breeding for this and several other hole nesting bird species (Dangerfield 2011).

Nest boxes were erected in 2009 and one pair of tits bred successfully in four boxes over a six-year period, raising in excess of forty young. Breeding took place at least twice per annum from 2009 to 2013 during the wetter April–July and October–December months, while from August 2014 to January 2016, during a prolonged period of low rainfall, eleven young fledged from a total of six clutches.

Between 2007 and 2012 a pair of White-bellied Tits *Parus albiventris* also utilised four nest boxes and successfully raised a total of nineteen young from ten clutches. This is believed to represent the first record of these two *Parus* species breeding alongside each other.

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