

Observations of forest birds at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park, Machakos County, Kenya

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Summary

A previous report recorded 19 species of forest-dependent birds in Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park. Using field surveys, literature review, and database records, we add an additional 17 forest-dependent bird species bringing the total number to 36.

Keywords Ol Donyo Sabuk, forest-dependent birds, conservation, distribution

Introduction

Munyekenye & Githiru (2010) report 19 species of forest-dependent birds (Bennun *et al.* 1996) detected on transect surveys in Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park (1°7'50" S, 37°15'35" E) in October and November 2007 (excluding Yellow-spotted Barbet *Bucanodon duchaillui*, which we treat here as unconfirmed). Following several visits to this mountain ourselves, a review of literature and author-verified database (eBird) records, and including reports forwarded to us for this paper, we provide details here of an additional seventeen species. This brings the total number of forest-dependent birds occurring at Ol Donyo Sabuk to 36 (Appendix 1). Taxonomy and nomenclature follow Bird Committee, EANHS (2009).

Species accounts

Scaly Francolin *Francolinus squamulatus*

This species, familiar to all the authors, was observed by DO on 10 May 2015. Considering an anecdotal report in June 2008, and that this secretive species is easily overlooked, it seems possible it may be resident at Ol Donyo Sabuk in small numbers.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Single birds observed on 7 January 1978 (EANHS 1979) and 21 March 1982 (EANHS OS-c 1983) appear to comprise the only records of this scarce Palaearctic raptor at Ol Donyo Sabuk. It may only occur at this site as a transiting passage migrant.

Ayres's Hawk Eagle *Aquila ayersii*

A single adult was seen well by DO on 6 March 2016 and photographed in flight (Fig. 1). The habitat in the National Park appears quite suitable for this forest raptor, yet the absence of other observations suggests it may only be a wanderer to Ol Donyo Sabuk.



Figure 1. Adult Ayres's Hawk Eagle at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park, 6 March 2016 (photo: D. Ogada).

Mountain Buzzard *Buteo oreophilus*

A perched bird was seen well by several experienced observers, including DO, on 2 June 2012. Additional individuals were observed by DO on 10 May 2015 and 21 February 2016, and these comprise the only records at Ol Donyo Sabuk, where it may be resident.

Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*

A pair was first observed displaying over high parts of the mountain on 8 April 2006 (F. Ng'weno pers. comm.). Further observations, including of pairs, were made by DO on 1 May 2009, 21 February 2016 and 6 March 2016. Combined with authors' observations of juvenile birds in immediately adjacent areas in August 2011 and November 2016, it seems this is probably a resident breeding species at Ol Donyo Sabuk.

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba delegorguei*

An adult male was reported by two experienced observers from just below the summit of Ol Donyo Sabuk in mid-June 2016 (W. Wachira pers. comm.). As is often the case with this species, the bird was observed in flight through a forest clearing, and the white nape was clearly seen. This pigeon is known to be an elevational migrant in nearby Nairobi, and its periodic occurrence at Ol Donyo Sabuk can be expected.

Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata*

A single bird was well-studied on the road at 2050 m on 24 October 2015 by JB and SC. We noted the medium size for a dove, brown colouration and contrasting white face. A second individual was heard calling the softly repeated "whoOOP" call from dense understorey nearby. This species may be only a seasonal visitor at Ol Donyo Sabuk.

African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus*

The liquid and jubilant call of this species was clearly heard from riverine figs at the base of the mountain on 23 September 2017 by DG and BM. Given the presence of numerous fruit trees at this site the omission of this widespread and common species from previous inventories of Ol Donyo Sabuk is surprising.



Figure 2a and b. Grey-olive Greenbul at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park, 23 September 2017 (photos: D. Guarnieri).

Grey-olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cerviniventris*

Two birds were seen on 17 September 2017 by SC, DG and BM along a rocky stream bed near the base of the mountain, but it was not until 23 September that the observation was confirmed by DG and BM with audio-recordings and photographs (Figs. 2a,b). This local species is also known from nearby Fourteen Falls on the Athi River (EANHS 1978).

Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops*

Two birds seen at the base of the mountain on 27 May 1978 appears to comprise the only record of this local and scarce species at Ol Donyo Sabuk (EANHS 1979).

African Hill Babbler *Pseudoalcippe abyssinica*

A single bird was heard singing at 2050m on 24 October 2015 by JB and SC. On 17 September 2017, DG, SC and BM obtained audio recordings of another singing bird at the same location, and on 23 September 2017 an individual was photographed (Fig. 3). We believe this vocal, but skulking, species is probably resident at this site and has merely been overlooked.

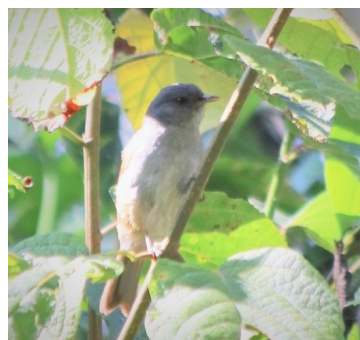


Figure 3. African Hill Babbler at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park, 23 September 2017 (photo: D. Guarnieri).

Red-capped Robin Chat *Cossypha natalensis*

Two individuals of this species were well-observed and audio-recorded near the base of the mountain on 23 September 2017 by DG and BM (Guarnieri 2017). This vocal species has been reported anecdotally from the mountain several times previously (F. Ng'weno pers. comm.), and we believe it is probably resident at this site.

African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*

A single bird was seen on 17 September 2017 by SC, DG and BM, and a pair was photographed at 2000m on 23 September 2017 by DG. This species is also mapped as occurring on the mountain by Zimmerman *et al.* (1996), although the few records suggest it is only a scarce resident at most.



Figure 3. Grey Apalis at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park, 23 September 2017 (photo: D. Guarnieri).

Grey Apalis *Apalis cinerea*

This apalis was heard singing at 2050m on 24 October 2015 by JB and SC, and was subsequently heard again on 17 September 2017 by SC, DG and BM before being photographed on 23 September 2017 (Fig. 4). The population here is currently isolated from the nearest conspecifics in Nairobi by approximately 45km, and in eastern Kenya, is the only example south of the Athi River.

Sharpe's Starling *Pholia sharpii*

A single individual reported from the mountain on 21 March 1982 (EANHS OS-c 1983) was presumably the basis for inclusion of Ol Donyo Sabuk in the range of this species by Zimmerman *et al.* (1996). Subsequent observations by DO on 2 June 2012 and 21 February 2016 suggests this species is at least a fairly regular visitor to the mountain and may possibly be resident in small numbers.

Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa*

A single non-breeding male was photographed at the summit on 15 June 2014 (Loland 2014) comprising a first record at Ol Donyo Sabuk. This species is known to be an

elevational migrant (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), and its periodic occurrence here can be expected.

Thick-billed Seedeater *Crithagra burtoni*

A single bird was well-studied in forest near the summit on 23 September 2017 by DG and BM. We noted the heavy bill, mostly dark underside, and two buffy-white wing bars typical for the species. It appears to have been overlooked at this site, where it is probably resident.

Characterized by a rich intersection of both montane forest and sub-montane woodlands, additional surveys are likely to reveal other forest-dependent birds as yet unknown at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park. Species reported from the mountain, but yet to be confirmed by supporting material, and which should be sought by future observers, include African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*, African Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii*, Trumpeter Hornbill *Bycanistes bucinator*, Eastern Nicator *Nicator gularis*, Black-throated Apalis *Apalis jacksoni* and Green-headed Sunbird *Cyanomitra verticalis*. All bird species occurring at Ol Donyo Sabuk undoubtedly benefit from the enforced protection within the boundaries of the National Park.

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Appendix 1.

Forest-dependent birds occurring in Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park. The category of forest dependence applied to each species here follows Bennun *et al.* (1996).

Species	Forest Dependence	Source
Scaly Francolin <i>Francolinus squamatus</i>	generalist	author observation
European Honey Buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	generalist	EANHS 1979, EANHS OS-c 1983
Great Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Mountain Buzzard <i>Buteo oreophilus</i>	generalist	author observation
Ayres's Hawk Eagle <i>Aquila ayersii</i>	generalist	author observation
Crowned Eagle <i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>	specialist	F. Ng'weno pers. comm.
Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon <i>Columba delegorguei</i>	specialist	W. Wachira pers. comm.
Lemon Dove <i>Aplopelia larvata</i>	specialist	author observation
Tambourine Dove <i>Turtur tympanistria</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
African Green Pigeon <i>Treron calvus</i>	generalist	author observation
Hartlaub's Turaco <i>Tauraco hartlaubi</i>	specialist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Red-chested Cuckoo <i>Cuculus solitarius</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
African Emerald Cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater <i>Merops oreobates</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird <i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Black-backed Puffback <i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Grey Apalis <i>Apalis cinerea</i>	specialist	author observation
Yellow-whiskered Greenbul <i>Andropadus latirostris</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Grey-olive Greenbul <i>Phyllastrephus cerviniventris</i>	generalist	author observation
Cabanis's Greenbul <i>Phyllastrephus cabanisi</i>	specialist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Green-capped Eremomela <i>Eremomela scotops</i>	generalist	EANHS 1979
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
African Hill Babbler <i>Pseudoalcippe abyssinica</i>	specialist	author observation
Montane White-eye <i>Zosterops poliogastrus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Sharpe's Starling <i>Pholia sharpii</i>	specialist	EANHS OS-c 1983
Olive Thrush <i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Rüppell's Robin Chat <i>Cossypha semirufa</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Red-capped Robin Chat <i>Cossypha natalensis</i>	generalist	author observation
White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher <i>Melaenornis fischeri</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
African Dusky Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa adusta</i>	generalist	author observation
Collared Sunbird <i>Hedydipna collaris</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Malachite Sunbird <i>Nectarinia famosa</i>	generalist	Loland 2014
Eastern Double-collared Sunbird <i>Cinnyris mediocris</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Brown-capped Weaver <i>Ploceus insignis</i>	specialist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Peters's Twinspot <i>Hypargos niveoguttatus</i>	generalist	Munyekenye & Githiru 2010
Thick-billed Seedeater <i>Crithagra burtoni</i>	specialist	author observation