

East Africa's diminishing bird habitats and bird species

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Forests, wetlands and grasslands the world-over are currently under direct threat as all countries faced with rapidly increasing human populations strive to improve their agricultural potential. East Africa is no exception and today with populations reaching unprecedented and possibly unsustainable levels, our natural habitats are under their greatest pressures. As a result, several bird species face potential extinction, and in some cases have already entered that final state.

East Africa is one of several centres of endemism in Africa, and boasts no fewer than 51 bird species occurring *only* in our relatively small region – Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. While Tanzania is clearly at the centre of East Africa's endemism with 60 per cent of all the endemics occurring within its national boundaries, it is imperative and incumbent upon all countries to give the highest possible attention to ensure that critical habitats where endemic species occur are afforded the maximum possible protection. The drawing up and subsequent publication of Important Bird Areas was a major step forward in identifying such areas in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (Bennun & Njoroge 1999, Byaruhanga *et al.* 2001, Baker & Baker 2002).

Endemism is an indication of the richness of any region's or country's biodiversity and, coupled with a network of protected areas, the East Africa region is rich in both. Over a thousand bird species have been recorded in each of our three largest countries (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), a statistic equalled only by the DR Congo, and vast areas of East Africa are currently gazetted as either National Parks, Game or Forest Reserves.

Forests, wetlands and grasslands are three of the world's major global habitats, ranking alongside the oceans in terms of the surface area of the planet. They are by far the most important habitats for bird and mammal species in East Africa, and as such, many have become some of the world's greatest tourist attractions, resulting in vital foreign exchange earnings for each national exchequer.

However, recent national census records have indicated human population increases in all countries, and in Kenya in particular a steep rise that is already sending alarm bells ringing both locally and internationally. In short, Kenya appears to have fast outstripped its carrying capacity, as a result there is now an acute shortage of both arable and grazing lands. This in turn has placed unprecedented pressures on all forests, wetlands and grasslands as populations seek to acquire sufficient land for their immediate needs, and as every year passes we witness important bird habitats shrinking in the face of burgeoning re-settlement schemes and the resultant intensive agricultural projects that follow. Such impacts have resulted in a decline in both bird habitats and biodiversity.

Of particular concern are the areas important to all our endemic bird species, and already we are witnessing a series of very worrying developments. Taking each

country in turn we can clearly see the effect of such unplanned developments and the subsequent degradation of important bird habitats and its effect on several species that are so dependent upon them.

Kenya

Category A species: Endemic species occurring *only* in Kenya

Jackson's Francolin *Francolinus jacksoni*
Central Highland Forest species

Williams's Lark *Mirafra williamsi*
Northern desert areas. **Data Deficient**

Aberdare Cisticola *Cisticola aberdare*
Endangered Highland Grassland species

[Tana River Cisticola *Cisticola restrictus*]
Considerable doubt exists regarding the validity of this taxon

Hinde's Babbler *Turdoides hindei*
Vulnerable in several central areas

Taita Thrush *Turdus helleri*
Critically Endangered Taita Hills Forest species

Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golandi*
Endangered Coastal Forest species

Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei*
Endangered Highland Grassland species

Category B species: EA endemic species shared with Tanzania

Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae*
Endangered Coastal Forest species

Grey-crested Helmetshrike *Prionops poliolophus*
Near Threatened Acacia woodland species

Red-throated Tit *Parus fringillinus*
Widespread throughout Masailand

Northern Pied Babbler *Turdoides hypoleuca*
Savannahs, *Acacia* woodlands and suburban gardens

Hidebrandt's Starling *Lamprotornis hildebrandti*
Acacia savannahs

Abbott's Starling *Cinnyricinclus femoralis*
Vulnerable Highland Forest species

Kenrick's Starling *Poeoptera kenricki*
Localized Highland Forest species

Amani Sunbird *Hedydipna pallidigaster*
Endangered Forest species

Tsavo Sunbird *Cinnyris tsavoensis*
Commiphora and *Acacia* thornscrub

Rufous-tailed Weaver *Histurgops ruficauda*
Acacia savannahs

Taveta Golden Weaver *Ploceus castaneiceps*
Swamps and bush around the base of Mt Kilimanjaro

Jackson's Widowbird *Euplectes jacksoni*
Near Threatened Highland Grassland species

Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis*
Endangered Coastal Forest species

Southern Grosbeak Weaver *Crithagra buchanani*
Commiphora and *Acacia* thornscrub

Category C species: EA endemic species shared with both Tanzania and Uganda

Hartlaub's Turaco *Tauraco hartlaubi*
Highland Forest species

Hunter's Cisticola *Cisticola hunteri*
Highland and moorland shrubbery from 1550 to 4400 m

Karamoja Apalis *Apalis karamojae*
Vulnerable acacia savannah species

Black-lored Babbler *Turdoides sharpei*
Acacia savannahs

Kenya Rufous Sparrow *Passer rufocinctus*
Acacia savannahs and cultivation

Category D species: Those species currently extirpated from Kenya or close to being so

Forest Wood-Hoopoe *Phoeniculus castaneiceps*
Formerly in western forests

Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*
Formerly in western forests

Bennett's Woodpecker *Campethera bennettii*
Specimen record from Mombasa July 1918

Sooty Boubou *Laniarius leucorhynchus*
Specimen record from Kakamega April 1931

White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa*
Formerly in Tana riverine forests

Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*
Formerly on Mt Kasigau, Taita District

Kretschmer's Longbill *Macrosphenus kretschmeri*
Formerly in Kitovu Forest near Taveta

Yellow-mantled Weaver *Ploceus tricolor*
Formerly in western forests

Category E species: Those Afrotropical species for which there have been no fully documented records post 31 December 1979

Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*

High altitude Grassland species

Abyssinian Long-eared Owl *Asio abyssinicus*

Mt Kenya *Hagenia* Forest from 2800 to 3500 m

Little Grey Greenbul *Andropadus gracilis*

Kakamega Forest

Tanzania

Category A species: Endemic species occurring *only* in Tanzania

Udzungwa Forest Partridge *Xenoperdix udzungwensis*

Endangered species (Eastern Arc mountains)

Grey-breasted Spurfowl *Francolinus rufopictus*

Serengeti grasslands

Pemba Green Pigeon *Treron pembaensis*

Vulnerable species confined to Pemba Island

Fischer's Lovebird *Agapornis fischeri*

Near Threatened species (Serengeti-Eyasi basin)

Yellow-collared Lovebird *Agapornis personatus*

Widespread in eastern Baobab savannahs

Pemba Scops Owl *Otus pembaensis*

Vulnerable species confined to Pemba Island

Usambara Eagle Owl *Bubo vosseleri*

Vulnerable Forest species (Usambara Mountains)

Uluguru Bush Shrike *Malaconotus alius*

Critically Endangered Forest species (Uluguru Mountains)

Mrs Moreau's Warbler *Scepomycter winifredae*

Vulnerable species (Ulugurus and Ukagurus)

Rubeho Warbler *Scepomycter rubehoensis*

Vulnerable Forest species (Rubeho Mountains)

Pemba White-eye *Zosterops vaughani*

Confined to Pemba Island

Ashy Starling *Lamprotornis unicolor*

Widespread in *Acacia* woodlands, thornscrub and savannahs

Usambara Thrush *Turdus roehli*

Near Threatened Forest species (Usambara Mountains)

Usambara Akalat *Sheppardia montana*

Endangered Forest species (Usambara Mountains)

Iringa Akalat *Sheppardia lowei*

Vulnerable Forest species (Southern Highlands)

Mt Rubeho Akalat *Sheppardia aurantithorax*

Vulnerable Forest species (Rubeho Mountains)

Banded Green Sunbird *Anthreptes rubritorques*

Vulnerable Forest species (Eastern Arc Mountains)

Moreau's Sunbird *Cinnyris moreaui*

Near Threatened species (Eastern Arc forests)

Loveridge's Sunbird *Cinnyris loveridgei*

Near Threatened Forest species (Uluguru Mountains)

Pemba Sunbird *Cinnyris pembaensis*

Confined to Pemba Island

Rufous-winged Sunbird *Cinnyris rufipennis*

Vulnerable Forest species (Udzungwa Mountains)

Kilombero Weaver *Ploceus burnieri*

Vulnerable species (Kilombero floodplain)

Usambara Weaver *Ploceus nicolli*

Vulnerable Forest species (Eastern Arc Mountains)

Tanzania Thick-billed Seedeater *Serinus melanochrous*

Near threatened species (Mt Rungwe)

Category B and C species: EA endemic species shared with other countries. See under Kenya.

Plus five Near-Endemic species shared with Mozambique and/or Malawi and Zambia.

Dark Forest Batis *Batis crypta*

Near Threatened Forest species

Long-billed Tailorbird *Artisornis moreaui*

Vulnerable Forest species

Dappled Mountain Robin *Modulatrix orostruthus*

Near Threatened Forest species

Spot-throat *Modulatrix stictigula*

Highland Forest species

Tanganyika Masked Weaver *Ploceus reichardi*

Localized Papyrus swamp species

Category D species: Those species currently extirpated from Tanzania or close to being so.

Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa infuscata*

Formerly on Ukererewe Island, Lake Victoria

Category E species: Those Afrotropical species for which there have been no documented records post 31 December 1979.

Long-toed Flufftail *Sarothrura lugens*

Type specimen only from Ugalla wetlands (January 1883)

Black-headed Plover *Vanellus tectus*

Vagrant to dry northern savannahs (one record August 1962)

Southern (Vincent's) Rock Bunting *Emberiza capensis vincenti*

Rocky outcrops Songea District

Uganda

Category A species: Endemic species occurring *only* in Uganda

Fox's Weaver *Ploceus spekeoides*

Near Threatened species in swampy savannah

Category B species: Albertine Rift Endemics (those species shared with countries bordering the Albertine Rift Valley)

Handsome Francolin *Francolinus nobilis*

Montane forest undergrowth and bamboo 2100 to 3700 m

Ruwenzori Turaco *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni*

Montane forests from 2100 to 3600 m

Dwarf Honeyguide *Indicator pumilio*

Near Threatened Forest species from 1500 to 2100 m

African Green Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri*

Endangered Forest species at 2000 m

Archer's Robin Chat *Cossypha archeri*

Montane forest undergrowth from 1800 to 4000 m

Red-throated Alethe *Alethe poliophrys*

Montane forest undergrowth and bamboo 1500 to 2700 m

Oberlaender's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi*

Near Threatened Lowland Forest species

Grauer's Rush Warbler *Bradypterus graueri*

Vulnerable Forest Swamp species 1500 to 2100 m

Red-faced Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus laetus*

Montane forest and bamboo from 1500 to 2800 m

Montane Masked Apalis *Apalis personata*

Montane forest from 1800 to 2700 m

Ruwenzori Collared Apalis *Apalis ruwenzori*

Montane forest undergrowth from 1500 to 3000 m

Short-tailed Warbler *Hemitesia neumanni*

Bwindi Forest undergrowth from 1500 to 2100 m

Grauer's Warbler *Graueria vittata*

Bwindi Forest undergrowth from 1600 to 2400 m

Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis ardesiaca*

Bwindi Forest clearings from 1550 to 2100 m

Ruwenzori Batis *Batis diops*

Montane forest from 1500 to 2700 m

Stripe-breasted Tit *Parus fasciiventer*

Montane forest from 1800 to 3300 m

Blue-headed Sunbird *Cyanomitra alinae*

Montane forest from 1500 to 3000 m

Regal Sunbird *Cinnyris regia*

Montane forest undergrowth and bamboo from 1500 to 3000 m

Purple-breasted Sunbird *Nectarinia purpureiventris*

Montane forest from 1500 to 2700 m

Stuhlmann's Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris stuhlmanni*

Montane forest from 2100 to 3700 m

Strange Weaver *Ploceus alienus*

Montane forest from 1500 to 3000 m

Dusky Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza jacksoni*

Montane forest undergrowth from 1500 to 2700 m

Shelley's Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza shelleyi*

Vulnerable Forest species from 1600 to 3400 m

Category C species: Four EA endemics shared with Kenya and Tanzania (see under Kenya)

Category D species: Those species currently extirpated from Uganda or close to being so

Shelley's Francolin *Francolinus shelleyi*

Formerly on Ankole grasslands

Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*

Formerly in eastern and southeastern savannahs

Category E species: Those Afrotropical species for which there have been no documented records post 31 December 1979

Orange River Francolin *Francolinus levaillantoides*

Mt Moroto and Kidepo Valley NP

Maccoa Duck *Oxyura maccoa*

Vagrant, no records post 1935

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Vagrant to Queen Elizabeth National Park

Chestnut-flanked Goshawk *Accipiter castanilius*

Bwamba Lowlands

Bates's Nightjar *Caprimulgus batesi*

Bwamba Lowlands

Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*

Nomadic grassland species

Pink-breasted Lark *Mirafra poecilosterna*

Moroto District

Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark *Eremopterix leucotis*
Moroto District and Mt Napak (Kamalinga)

Turner's Eremomela *Eremomela turneri*
Uganda-DR Congo border areas

Southern Hyliota *Hyliota australis*
Bwamba Lowlands

Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais*
Mt Moroto

Sassis's Olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus lorenzi*
Bwamba Lowlands, though doubt exists regarding the validity of the taxon

Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata*
Vagrant to West Nile and Queen Elizabeth National Park

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