

INDIGENOUS BIRDS

W. R. Tarboton*, C. T. Stuart** & I. A. W. Macdonald***

** African Arabian Wildlife Research Centre

Sources of information

The main data sources used are:

ANON. Undated. *Birds of the Greater Kuduland Conservancy*. Unpublished.

HARRISON, J. A., ALLAN, D. G., UNDERHILL, L. G., HERREMANS, M., TREE, A. J., PARKER, V. & BROWN, C. J. (ESD). *The Atlas of southern African birds*. Vols I & II. Birdlife South Africa, Johannesburg.

MARAIS, E. Undated. *A guide to the birds of Ben Lavin Nature Reserve*. Unpublished.

STEWART, C. T., STEWART, T., GAIGHER, I. G., GAIGHER, M. J. 2001. *Checklists for the fauna of the Western Soutpansberg*. Soutpansberg Conservancy, Louis Trichardt.

TARBOTON, W. R., KEMP, M. I. & KEMP, A. C. 1987. *Birds of the Transvaal*. Transvaal Museum, Pretoria.

This list of species occurring in the Soutpansberg is most probably 100% complete for species of any significance - any new species coming in from now on will probably be rare vagrants, of little ecological or conservation significance. However, finer scale data on where exactly the various species occur within the Soutpansberg, how they move seasonally, how large their populations are and how the species is faring in the area is only available for a few of the larger birds of prey and vultures.

Summary statistics

The whole greater Soutpansberg area [*sensu lato* = van Wyk and Smith's (2001) Soutpansberg Centre], has a total indigenous avifauna of \pm 510 species (CTS). This is 56% of the southern African avifauna (CTS — ex Sthn Afrn Bird Atlas = 910 species) and 76% of the South African terrestrial and freshwater avifauna when vagrants and oceanic species are excluded (CTS - ex Sthn Afrn Bird Atlas = 666 species). If only the Soutpansberg mountain range itself is included then the avifauna totals about 380 to 400 species (WT).

If we look at smaller areas within this area the diversity is equally outstanding, e.g. the Western Soutpansberg (900 km²) has an avifauna of 298 species (Stuart, Stuart, Gaigher & Gaigher, 2001), the quarter degree Grid Square 2230AA (an area of \pm 700 km²) has 338 native species - but this includes core areas on the mountain such as the Luonde Forest as well as areas on the plains south of the mountain range including the Albasini Dam (IAWM - Sthn Afrn Bird Atlas + IAWM in press), the quarter degree grid square which includes the Greater

Kuduland Conservancy 2130DA (an area of 700 km²) has 412 species and the Greater Kuduland Conservancy itself (150 km²) has 304 species. Lajuma, a 4,3 km² area mainly forested and totally within the Soutpansberg mountains has 100 species (this is likely to be a considerable underestimate as the area's avifauna has not yet been intensively studied).

Birds of prey are especially well represented, with 38 species, as are forest-living species, and species restricted to moist savanna (on SE side of mountain range) and to arid savanna (on NW side of the mountains). Some of the "special" species of the Soutpansberg are Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, Forest Buzzard *Buteo trizonatus*, Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*, Crested Guineafowl *Guttera pucherani*, Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer*, Knysna Turaco *Tauraco corythaix*, Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli*, Mottled Spinetail *Telecanthura ussheri*, Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina*, African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis*, Grey Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina caesia*, African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus*, Eastern Bearded Robin *Erythropgyia quadrivirgata*, Gorgeous Bush Shrike *Telephorus quadricolor*, Black-fronted Bush Shrike *T. nigrifrons*, Golden-backed Pytilia *Pytilia afra*, Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula* and Pink-throated Twinspot *Hypargos margaritatus*. Birdwatchers from all over the world come to the Soutpansberg to see these "specials" and, of course, the many other species that are present here.

At least 6 Red Data-listed 'vulnerable' species occur here (White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*, Cape Vulture, Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*, African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*, Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*, Pel's Fishing Owl), and 11 'near-threatened' species (Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Bat Hawk, Ayres' Eagle *Hieraetus ayresii*, Crowned Eagle, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus minor* and Lanner Falcons *Falco biarmicus*, Half-collared Kingfisher *Alcedo semitorquata*, African Broadbill, Orange Thrush *Zoothera gurneyi*, Wattle-eyed Flycatcher *Platysteira peltata*, Pink-throated Twinspot). Although not Red Data-listed, three other rare South African species also occur here - Blue-spotted Dove, Mottled Spinetail, Golden-backed Pytilia *Phytalia afra* — and the Soutpansberg is the stronghold in South Africa for these species. Another very unusual species — Ruppell's Vulture *Gyps rupellii* — was discovered (a single bird) living in the Cape Vulture breeding colony at Blouberg. This is the first South African record for this East African species.

Major studies and publications

See the list of data sources above

Recommendations for priority studies required to fill any gaps identified

The most important studies that should be done are:

- a fine scale survey of the distribution of bird species in the Soutpansberg (this to be done in such a way that it will provide a “baseline” against which future changes in the status of the area’s bird species can be measured by repeating these surveys in all or parts of the range),
- retrospective analyses of any regularly recorded areas to see if any trends in reporting frequency can be determined as an indicator of population changes in the native bird species in the Soutpansberg,
- continuation of the monitoring of the breeding populations and nesting success of the larger birds of prey and Cape Vulture colonies in the Soutpansberg (including the Blouberg).

“Hot spots” of particular importance

In terms of bird ‘hotspots’ in the Soutpansberg, WT would list the following:

- the Cape Vulture breeding colonies on the Blouberg (700–800 pairs, the second largest colony of this species in existence) and on Buffelspoort and

Uniondale, just west of the Sand River (50–100 pairs)

- the extensive network of large cliffs found west of Louis Trichardt, and especially west of the Sand River: some 6–7 pairs of Peregrine Falcons nest here and at least 22 breeding pairs of Black Eagles nest west of the Sand River.
- the Mottled Spinetail breeding colony (100+ nesting pairs) in the ‘Big Baobab’ near Klein Tshipise
- the patch of *Brachystegia* woodland at Shakadza (in Nwanedzi catchment): this has the potential of harbouring a population of one or more miombo-restricted species
- the baobab stands along the northern slopes of the Soutpansberg west of the Sand River: these provide breeding sites for a number of large eagles, including at least 1 pair of Martial Eagle and 6 pairs of African Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster*.
- all forest patches, but especially those on Entabeni, where a pair of Bat Hawks breed, where there are several nesting pairs of Crowned Eagle and where such Red Data species as Orange Thrush and African Broadbill occur.
- the gallery of riparian forest along the Sand River where it cuts through the Soutpansberg, providing habitat for White-backed Night Heron, Pel’s Fishing Owl and others.



N. Hahn