

Avifauna of Ishaqbini Community Conservancy in Ijara District, NE Kenya

Peter Njoroge, Muchai Muchane, Wanyoike Wamiti,
Dominic Kimani Kamau, and Mwangi Githiru

Ishaqbini community conservancy, in the arid northern-eastern Kenya was established in 2006 by local pastoralists as a community initiative to safeguard their wildlife heritage especially the endemic *Hirola Beatrags hunteri*. Prior to this survey there were no known recent avifaunal surveys for the area despite the fact that the conservancy lies adjacent to the relatively well-known lower Tana River forests, an important bird area (Bennun & Njoroge 1999), as well as the East Africa coast forests endemic bird area (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). In this paper we present the results of an avifaunal survey of the conservancy that includes a description of the bird assemblages in the conservancy, and an annotated account of some species of global and regional conservation concern occurring there.

Study area and methods

Ishaqbini Community Conservancy (01° 55' S and 040° 10' E; Figure 1) is located in Ijara District, North Eastern Province of Kenya on land designated as Trust Land. The conservancy covers an approximate area of 72 km². It is bordered to the west by Tana River Primate Reserve and by the Garissa-Lamu road to the East. The area is generally low-lying with elevations of between 39 and 65 m a.s.l., and receives a mean annual rainfall of about 500 mm during two rainy seasons, April to June and October to December. However, rainfall patterns in Ijara District are greatly influenced by the coastal monsoons, making the area wetter and cooler than the neighbouring arid districts. The Transboundary Environmental Project (TEP 2004) described the habitat in the conservancy as mainly composed of closed to open woody thickets, open low shrubs and shrub-savannah. Lowland evergreen riverine forests occur in patches on alluvial sediment deposits along the boundary with Tana River Primate Reserve. Apart from being a stronghold for the *Hirola*, the Conservancy has an impressive diversity of wildlife that include the endangered African Wild Dog *Lycan pictus*, African Elephant *Loxodonta africana*, Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* (occasional visitor), Desert Warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* and Somali Bush Baby *Galago gallarum*. The region is sparsely populated by pastoralist Somali communities.

Avifaunal surveys of the conservancy were conducted in two separate periods: the first in February 2007 (to coincide with the dry season) and the second in June 2007 (to coincide with the wet season). We used a combination

of mist-netting (total effort: 1392 net-metre hours), point counts (total: 70 point counts), timed species counts (total: 14 hours) and opportunistic observations to compile a bird species checklist for the conservancy. All mist netting sites and point count transects were geo-referenced for future monitoring purposes. Our nomenclature and systematics follow Zimmerman *et al.* (1996).

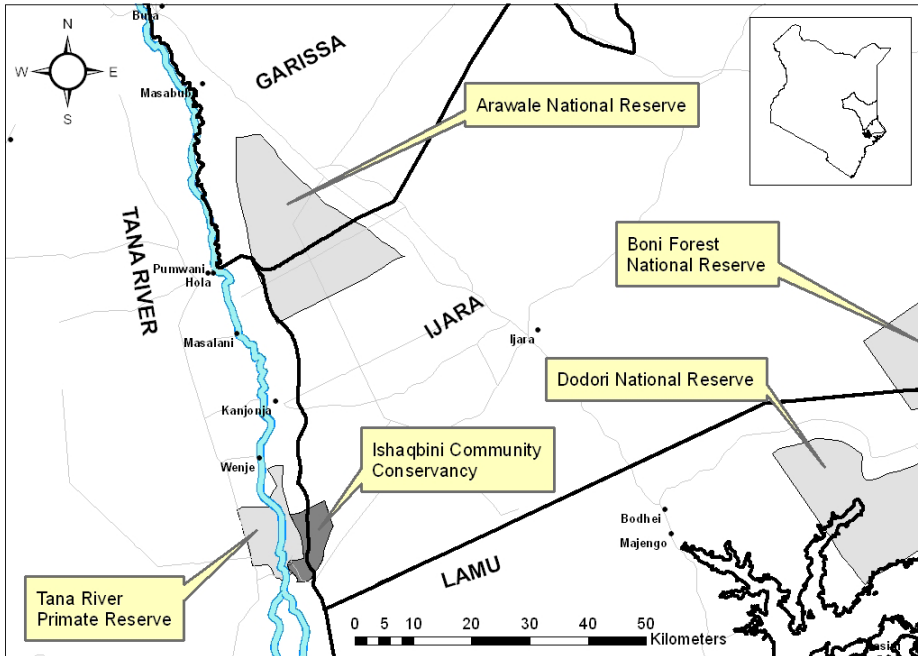


Figure 1. Map of the study site showing the location of the Ishaqbini Community Conservancy.

Results

A total of 184 bird species of 55 families were recorded over a total period of 11 days covering both the dry and wet seasons. Our species list (see Appendix) included 16 Palearctic migrants and 7 Afrotropical migrants. The list also includes six species listed as rare by the Ornithological Sub-committee of the East Africa Natural History Society (OS-c 1996). Fischer's Turaco *Tauraco fischeri* was the only globally threatened species (IUCN 2008) recorded in the conservancy, but 13 species listed in East Africa's regional red data list (Bennun & Njoroge 1996, Bennun *et al.* 2000) were also recorded. Among the 13 species was one vulnerable (R-VU), eight regionally near-threatened (R-NT) and three regional responsibility species (RR). We also noted range extensions for 20 species (Appendix), most of which had never been recorded beyond the Tana River (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989).

Twenty-three species characteristic of the Somali-Masai biome and seven species characteristic of East African Coastal biome were recorded. The East African Coast biome species recorded were Fischer's Turaco, Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus*, Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides*, Northern Brownbul *Phyllastrephus strepitans*, Brown-breasted Barbet *Lybius melanopterus*, Mombasa Woodpecker *Campethera mombassica* and Black-bellied Starling *Lamprotornis corruscus*. There were also coastal races of some common species such as Tropical Boubou *Lanius aethiopicus sublacteus*, Black-backed Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla affinis* and Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudata lorti*.

Species of conservation concern

Thirteen species listed in East Africa's Regional Red Data List (Bennun & Njoroge 1996) were recorded. The following are brief notes for some of these species.

Fischer's Turaco (G-NT)

Listed as near-threatened by IUCN (IUCN 2008) and a regional endemic, this is one of the seven species that define the East Africa coast forests endemic bird area (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). It has a range that extends from Boni in Kenya south to Tanga in Tanzania, and inland along the Tana River to Garsen and Bura (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). Three individuals were observed once in the riverine forest bordering Tana River Primate Reserve during the first survey period in February 2007. However, the subsequent wet season visit to the area did not record the species.

Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* (R-VU)

This stork is known to breed in the lower parts of the Tana River (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996) but it is rare elsewhere in the country probably due to lack of suitable habitat. A single individual was recorded during the wet season on cultivated floodplains in the southern parts of Ishaqbini Community Conservancy.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* (R-NT)

Like the Saddle-billed Stork, the threatened regional status maybe due to shrinking of its preferred habitats. It is known to be mostly found in the coastal lowlands in East Africa where it is usually solitary or in pairs (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996, Britton 1980). We recorded several hundred soaring above the Tana River at Baomo during the dry season survey in February 2007. There are reports that they may exhibit some local movements where they flock together in several hundreds (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Only a single individual was recorded during the wet season survey in June 2007 flying over the cultivated floodplain in the south of Ishaqbini Community Conservancy.

Mombasa Woodpecker *Campethera mombassica* (RR)

This species characteristic of the East Africa coast biome was recorded once in *Acacia* woodlands at Kitere in the southern part of the conservancy.

Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) describe it as locally fairly common in forest and coastal woodland but it was not common in Ishaqbini.

Violet-breasted Sunbird *Nectarinia chalconelas* (R-NT)

Considered rare (OS-c 1996), this species inhabits the moist coastal scrub and grassy thickets in area from Somali border to Kiunga and inland to Ijara (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). The species was regularly seen during the survey in *Acacia* thickets and one individual was caught in riverine woodland during the wet season survey in June 2007.

Other regionally threatened species recorded in Ishaqbini Community Conservancy include Green-backed Heron *Butorides striatus* (R-NT), Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (R-NT), Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*(R-NT), Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (R-NT), Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* RR), Long-tailed Fiscal *Lanius cabanisi* (RR) and Pink-breasted Lark *Mirafra poecilosterna* (RR).

Discussion

With 184 bird species recorded in two relatively short surveys, Ishaqbini Community Conservancy has fairly high species richness. This may be attributed to the diversity of habitats within the conservancy as well as its location at the intersection of two bio-diverse biomes – Somali-Masai and East Africa Coastal Forests biomes. The conservancy compares favourably with other frequently visited bird-watching hotspots in the region, such as Arabuko-Sokoke Forest with about 230 species (Fanshawe 1995). Estimates obtained based on the Bird Atlas of Kenya (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989) and databases held at the Ornithology section of the National Museums of Kenya, the number of species expected for this area (Quarter Degree Square 79c-Lewis & Pomeroy 1989) is about 300 species.

Given the numbers of Somali-Masai and East Africa Coastal Forests biome species present, the Ishaqbini Community Conservancy would qualify as an Important Bird Area (Fishpool 1996). However, numbers of each biome species recorded are low as compared to other IBAs in the region. For example, while the neighbouring Tana River forests IBA has 19 of the 30 Kenyan species of the East African Coastal Forests biome (Bennun & Njoroge 1999), only seven were recorded at Ishaqbini. The conservancy also compares poorly with other Somali-Masai biome IBAs e.g. Tsavo East National Park has 60 of the 92 Kenyan Somali-Masai biome species as compared to only 23 recorded at Ishaqbini. Still, it is worth noting that, firstly, our checklist is unlikely to be complete and more species may yet be recorded with more intensive surveys, and secondly, the other protected areas, particularly Tsavo, are much larger. Besides, Ishaqbini is unique in having reasonable numbers of species representative of both biomes. The conservancy is clearly delimitable from the surrounding areas, large enough to stand alone and hence amenable to conservation independently. Finally, being a conservation initiative of the

local community themselves, the conservancy could serve as the ideal example for neighbouring communities to emulate.

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Peter Njoroge*, Muchai Muchane, Wanyoike Wamiti, Dominic Kimani Kamau and Mwangi Githiru

Department of Zoology, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658-00100, Nairobi

**E-mail for correspondence: pnjoroge@museums.or.ke*

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Appendix

List of all species recorded at Ishaqbini Community Conservancy during the survey, their status (am=afrotropical migrant, pm=palaeartic migrant, R-VU= regionally vulnerable, R-NT= regionally near-threatened, R-RR=regional responsibility, new QSD= new record for quarter degree square 79c, X = considered rare by OS-c 1996) and sampling method that recorded the species (1=mist-netting, 2=point counts, 3=timed species counts, 4=opportunistic observations).

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	1	2	3	4
Somali Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus molybdophanes</i>	R-NT			□	
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	R-RR, new QSD			□	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	R-RR				□
Long-tailed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>					□
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	am, pm				□
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	am		□	□	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				□	
Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>	R-NT			□	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	am, pm, R-NT			□	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	R-NT			□	
Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>	R-NT			□	
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>			□	□	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>			□	□	
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	R-NT				□
Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>	R-VU				□
Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>					□
African Open-billed Stork	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>			□	□	
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>			□	□	
Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>			□	□	
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>			□	□	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	am, pm			□	
African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>					□
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>					□
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>					□
Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	am			□	
Secretary Bird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>					□
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			□	□	
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>					□
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>			□	□	
Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	pm				□
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>				□	
Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax poliopterus</i>				□	
Little Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter minullus</i>	X				□
African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>			□		
Pygmy Falcon	<i>Polihierax semitorquatus</i>					□
Harlequin Quail	<i>Corturnix delegorqueti</i>	new QSD				□

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	1	2	3	4
Crested Francolin	<i>Francolinus sephaena</i>		☐	☐		
Yellow-necked Spurfowl	<i>Francolinus leucoscepus</i>				☐	
Vulturine Guineafowl	<i>Acryllium vulturinum</i>			☐	☐	
Black Crake	<i>Amauromis flavirostra</i>	new QSD				☐
White-bellied Bustard	<i>Eupodotis senegalensis</i>					☐
Black-bellied Bustard	<i>Eupodotis melanogaster</i>	new QSD			☐	
Buff-crested Bustard	<i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>					☐
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>					☐
Eurasian Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>	pm, X, new QSD				☐
Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>				☐	
Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>					☐
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>				☐	
Spur-winged Plover	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>				☐	
Black-headed Plover	<i>Vanellus tectus</i>			☐	☐	
Senegal Plover	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>			☐	☐	
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	pm				☐
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	pm			☐	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	pm			☐	
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>	new QSD			☐	
Black-faced Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles decoratus</i>			☐	☐	
African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calva</i>			☐	☐	
Tambourine Dove	<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>				☐	
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>			☐	☐	
African Mourning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>			☐	☐	
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>			☐	☐	
Fischer's Turaco	<i>Tauraco fischeri</i>					☐
Eurasian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	pm, X, new QSD			☐	
Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>			☐		
Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>				☐	
White-browed Coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>			☐	☐	
African Scops Owl	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>					☐
Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus pectoralis</i>					☐
Gabon Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus fossii</i>	X, new QSD		☐	☐	
Slender-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus clarus</i>					☐
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			☐	☐	
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
White-headed Mousebird	<i>Colius leucocephalus</i>		☐			
Blue-naped Mousebird	<i>Urocolius macrourus</i>			☐	☐	
Grey-headed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>			☐	☐	
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>		☐	☐		
Mangrove Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegaloides</i>		☐		☐	

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	1	2	3	4
Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>					☐
African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta</i>		☐	☐		
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>					☐
Carmine Bee-eater	<i>Merops nubicus</i>	am		☐	☐	
White-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>	am	☐	☐	☐	
Eurasian Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					☐
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudata</i>			☐	☐	
Green Woodhoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>			☐		
Common Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i>			☐		
Abyssinian Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus minor</i>		☐		☐	
Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>					☐
Von Der Decken's Hornbill	<i>Tockus deckeni</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Crowned Hornbill	<i>Tockus alboterminatus</i>			☐	☐	
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>			☐	☐	
Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>			☐		
Red-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus pusillus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Brown-breasted Barbet	<i>Lybius melanopterus</i>					☐
d'Arnaud's Barbet	<i>Trachylaemus darnaudii</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Scaly-throated Honeyguide	<i>Indicator variegatus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Greater Honeyguide	<i>Indicator indicator</i>		☐	☐		
Nubian Woodpecker	<i>Campethera nubica</i>		☐			
Mombasa Woodpecker	<i>Campethera mombassica</i>	R-RR		☐		
Green-backed Woodpecker	<i>Campethera cailliautii</i>		☐		☐	
Red-winged Lark	<i>Mirafra hypermetra</i>					☐
Pink-breasted Lark	<i>Mirafra poecilosterna</i>	R-RR			☐	
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>					☐
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	pm				☐
Golden Pipit	<i>Tmetothylacus tenellus</i>					☐
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>					☐
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	pm			☐	
Grassland Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>					
Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul	<i>Andropadus importunus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Northern Brownbul	<i>Phyllastrephus strepitans</i>		☐	☐		
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Rufous Chatterer	<i>Turdoides rubiginosus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
White-browed Robin Chat	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>					☐
White-browed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Eastern Bearded Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas quadrivirgata</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Rufous Bush Chat	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	pm	☐		☐	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	new QSD			☐	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	pm		☐		
Southern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis pammelaina</i>					☐
African Grey Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis microrhynchus</i>				☐	

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	1	2	3	4
Pale Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis pallidus</i>			☐		
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	pm, X, new QSD	☐		☐	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Pm, new QSD	☐			
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	pm		☐		
Winding Cisticola	<i>Cisticola galactotes</i>					☐
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>			☐		
Ashy Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cinereolus</i>	new QSD				☐
Pale Prinia	<i>Prinia somalica</i>					☐
Grey Wren Warbler	<i>Calamonastes simplex</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Northern Crombec	<i>Sylvietta brachyura</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Red-faced Crombec	<i>Sylvietta whytii</i>	new QSD				☐
Somali Long-billed Crombec	<i>Sylvietta isabellina</i>	new QSD				☐
Yellow-vented Eremomela	<i>Eremomela flavicrissalis</i>	new QSD			☐	
Pygmy Batis	<i>Batis perkeo</i>	new QSD				☐
Northern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus rueppelli</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Red-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>	pm				☐
Long-tailed Fiscal	<i>Lanius cabanisi</i>	R-RR				☐
Taita Fiscal	<i>Lanius dorsalis</i>					☐
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike	<i>Malaconotus sulfureopectus</i>			☐		
Grey-headed Bush-Shrike	<i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>			☐		
Tropical Boubou	<i>Laniarius aethiopicus</i>		☐	☐		
Slate-coloured Boubou	<i>Laniarius funebris</i>	new QSD			☐	☐
Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>		☐	☐		
Black Cuckoo Shrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>			☐		
Common Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	pm				☐
Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Black-bellied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis corruscus</i>			☐	☐	
Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>	new QSD		☐		
Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling	<i>Lamprotornis purpuropterus</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Superb Starling	<i>Lamprotornis superbus</i>			☐	☐	
Fischer's Starling	<i>Spreo fischeri</i>		☐	☐		
Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>			☐		
Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes orientalis</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Collared Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes collaris</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Mouse-coloured Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia veroxii</i>		☐			
Olive Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia olivacea</i>		☐	☐		
Amethyst Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia amethystina</i>			☐	☐	
Hunter's Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia hunteri</i>					☐
Variable Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia venusta</i>			☐		
Purple-banded Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia bifasciata</i>		☐	☐	☐	
Violet-breasted Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia chalconelas</i>	X	☐	☐	☐	

Common Name	Scientific name	Status	1	2	3	4
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	new QSD				□
Yellow-spotted Petronia	<i>Petronia pyrgita</i>			□	□	
White-headed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Dinemellia dinemelli</i>		□	□	□	
Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>		□	□	□	
Black-necked Weaver	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>		□		□	
Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>				□	
African Golden Weaver	<i>Ploceus subaureus</i>				□	
Vitelline Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>				□	
Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>Plocepasser itermedius</i>					□
Black-headed Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>					□
Chestnut Weaver	<i>Ploceus rubiginosus</i>			□		
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	am				□
Green-winged Pytilia	<i>Pytilia melba</i>		□			
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			□		
Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>					□
Bronze Mannikin	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>			□		