

# Conservation status of the forest birds of the Siria Plateau and western Maasai Mara, Narok County, Kenya

James Bradley and Tyler Davis

## Summary

In light of rapid deforestation across the Siria Plateau of southwest Kenya, we compile records and review the status and distribution of locally occurring forest dependent birds there. Records of forest birds in the western reaches of the Maasai Mara National Reserve are also included for reference, and bird richness in the area is briefly contrasted with that of other forests of southwest Kenya. Included in this review is a first account of the forest birds of the 1500-ha Nyakweri Forest.

**Keywords** Deforestation, Biodiversity, Migori River, Inventory, Forest birds

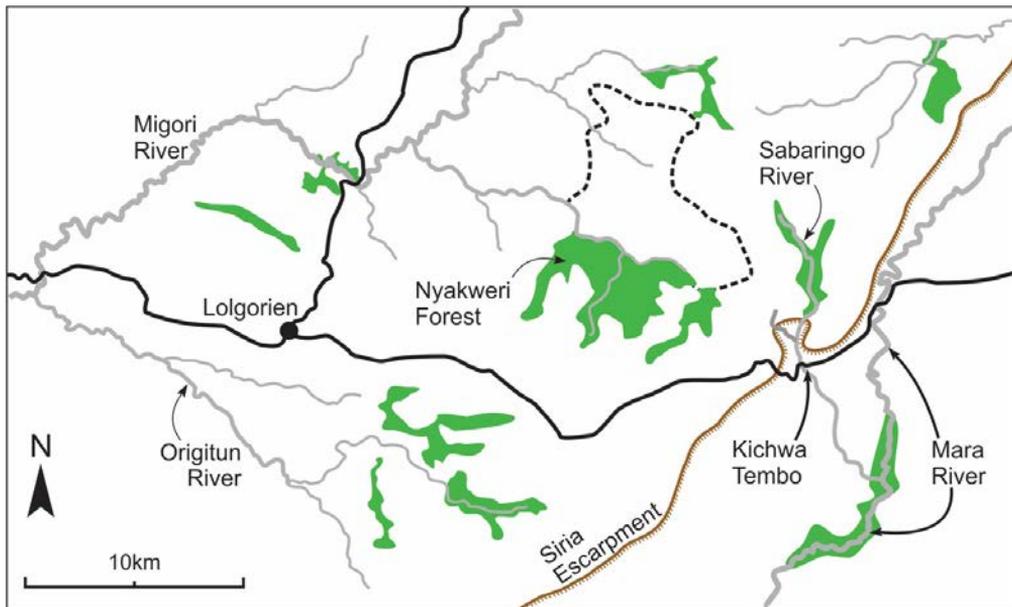
## Introduction

Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) map species of forest birds occurring in the western Maasai Mara and across the Siria Plateau, and a classification of forest birds by Bennun *et al.* (1996) provides a means of assessing the relative importance of forests for the conservation of forest bird diversity. Records of forest species from this area in the 22 years since have remained largely unpublished, and several exploratory surveys now permit the drafting of a species list for the previously unknown Nyakweri Forest, the largest extant forest in southwestern Kenya. In conjunction with this growing body of newer information, forest loss has been extensive since 2014, which has prompted this collective review of forest birds occurring in the region. In addition to putting our own field observations on record, we incorporate field observations and published records from a variety of other sources so as to provide some additional detail on the distribution and comparative abundance of forest birds across the area covered. It is hoped that such a regional specific study of forest bird occurrence as presented here, might provide some incentive or be useful in efforts to conserve what is left.

## Study area

Forest in the region discussed here is found in two main basins, with both rivers flowing in different directions into Lake Victoria along the eastern shores. First, the Migori River and its tributaries drain westwards across the Siria Plateau, which comprises an upland area with gentle relief situated around the town of Lolgorien (Fig 1.) and spanning the western three quarters of the region discussed here. The plateau is covered by an extensive area of forest-savanna mosaic at an elevation of approximately 1550–1900m, with primarily lower-montane vegetation characteristics. Second, the well forested Mara River drains southwards across the westernmost extent of the Maasai Mara at 1500–1600m, which covers the eastern quarter of the study area. Div-

iding these two local ecoregions, the steep and rocky Siria Escarpment (Esoit Oloololo Escarpment) comprises the easternmost limits of the Siria Plateau and the western extent of the Mara–Serengeti ecosystem, and rises to just over 2000 m. It is well wooded in a few places and drained by several small streams, including the slightly larger Sabaringo River, which flows into the Mara River downstream of groundwater forest at Kichwa Tembo Camp. Forest along the Sabaringo and covering parts of the divide between the Migori and Mara River basins, though increasingly degraded, continues to provide a biological link between the two main areas covered.



**Figure 1.** Map of the study area showing locations described in the text, the town of Lolgorien and main roads, as well as larger tracts of extant forest habitat (green shade). The former extent of Nyakweri Forest (pre-2014) is shown by the dashed line.

The most extensive and important remaining habitat for forest bird conservation in the region, is Nyakweri Forest ( $1^{\circ}12'S$ ,  $34^{\circ}56'E$ ), which is located midway between the Siria Escarpment and the town of Lolgorien. Approximately 1500 ha of contiguous forest remains at this site, which comprises a significant area likely to support viable populations of many of the species detailed here. Prior to 2014, this forest covered twice this area, and in light of the deforestation of the northern half in the years since (over 2000 ha), there is intense pressure on the remaining forest and its forest dependent bird species. Severe threat of habitat loss is also faced by forest dependent species, and in particular forest specialists, inhabiting the many smaller forest patches (<50 ha) peripheral to Nyakweri and along the Origitun River in the south of the region, which are also being rapidly cleared or degraded. As of the time of writing, Nyakweri Forest has been subdivided with plot titles issued, and its conservation now rests in the hands of private landowners.

## Data sources and presentation

Our field data from the region were collected from 2013 to early 2019 and comprise a series of site-visit checklists; each considered an individual survey unit regardless of

duration. Observations were made with 8x or 10x binoculars, while digital photography, audio recording and playback was also sometimes used to maximize the possibility of detecting all species present. Our data comprise four checklists from Nyakweri Forest (each visit 4+ hours), 15 checklists from smaller forest patches to the west, north and south of Nyakweri, and 65 checklists from Angama Lodge on the Siria Escarpment. To supplement our own field observations, we also include and reference where possible, any previously published records in short notes, papers or rare bird reviews, as well as a small number of records kindly forwarded to us for this paper by Brian Finch and Don Turner. Lastly, and with care, we include a number of records reported to local email listserves (Kenya Birdsnet Yahoo Group), and an open-user database (eBird).

Each species account includes a map showing the spatial distribution of records in the study area as shown in Figure 1, as well as a coarse indication of relative abundance by way of differing size markers: the smallest dot comprising a single survey record, a medium dot two to four records, and a large dot five or more records. The text also provides some information on aspects of a species ecology locally, including breeding information where known. It should be noted that including all data sources, relative observer effort in the area of the Mara River and Siria Escarpment area is considerably greater than elsewhere, including Nyakweri Forest. Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya* 4th edition (EANHS 2009) and references for online digital media and specimen material reviewed are given in Appendix A.

## Results and discussion

In the western Maasai Mara and Siria Plateau forests, we document the occurrence of 80 species of forest dependent birds, as defined by Bennun *et al.* (1996): 51 forest generalists and 29 forest specialists, comprising approximately 35 % of the total number of forest dependent species known to occur in Kenya. Of these, 18 can be considered representative of the Afrotropical highlands biome, while four are representative of the Congo-Guinea forests biome (Bennun & Njoroge 1999). Sixty species have been recorded in Nyakweri Forest or 8 km downstream on the Migori River (formerly connected by forest), where there is currently no legal forest protection, and 59 have been recorded in the forests of the western Maasai Mara at Kichwa Tembo and/or along the Mara River, where habitats are afforded better protection. Comparing the forest avifauna of these two discreet regions, 43 % (26 out of 60) of forest dependent birds occurring in Nyakweri Forest and downstream on the Migori River are comprised of forest specialists, compared with only 25 % (15 out of 59) at Kichwa Tembo or downstream on the Mara River. It can be further pointed out that many of the forest bird records from the western Maasai Mara involve single records, possibly of individuals wandering from the Siria Plateau forests in many cases. These figures highlight the importance of Nyakweri Forest in sustaining forest specialist bird populations at a regional level, the closest forest area of similar size and richness being more than 150 km distant.

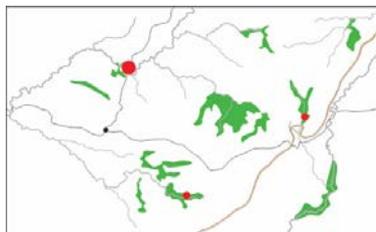
Elsewhere in southwest Kenya, the extensive Trans-Mara Forest lies *c.* 150 km to the northeast of the study region and is known to support a minimum of 66 forest dependent bird species (Bennun 1991b). One hundred kilometres to the west of the study region, the isolated and small forests of the Gwasssi Hills are known to support 54 species of forest dependent birds (Bradley *et al.* 2015, Bradley 2018, JB unpubl.).

While there is considerable overlap in the avifauna of all these forests, several species typical of higher montane forest and present both at Trans-Mara and the Gwas-si Hills have yet to be found in the study area. These include Mountain Greenbul *Andropadus nigriceps*, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler *Bradypterus cinnamomeus*, Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, White-browed Crombec *Sylvietta leucophrys*, Northern Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris reichenowi* and Black-billed Weaver *Ploceus melanogaster*. Conversely, the presence of Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas* in the study area is unique in western Kenya. Further surveys should seek to establish which subspecies of the latter is present, as these birds may comprise the only Kenya population of western *T. c. vivax*, as suggested by initial observations. Otherwise, and given the still limited amount of observational data from Nyakweri Forest, it can be expected that future observations will reveal additional forest birds as yet unrecorded in the area.

## Species accounts

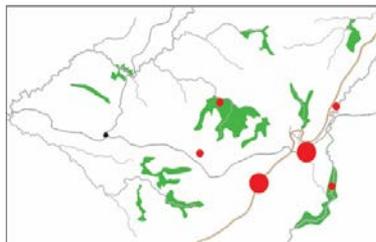
### **Crested Guineafowl** *Guttera pucherani*

Forest generalist. Pre-1995 records along the Migori River and in the Sabaringo Valley, with a more recent observation in the Oritutu drainage. Presumably only a rare resident, but has bred, with a record of young in October (Turner 1993, Finch 1994, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).



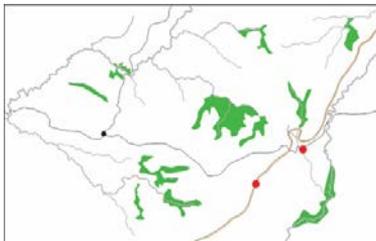
### **Scaly Francolin** *Francolinus squamatus*

Forest generalist. Local resident throughout the region and common only in moist thicket and dense forest understory in the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment.



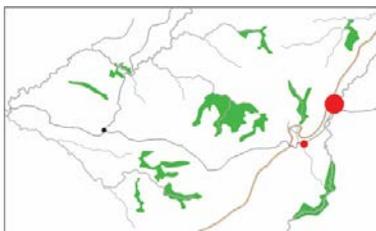
### **African Hobby** *Falco cuvieri*

Forest generalist. Very local and rare visitor to wooded areas of the Siria Escarpment from 1600 to 1900 m, with records in October 1989 and August 2017.



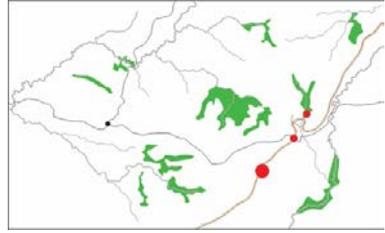
### **African Cuckoo Hawk** *Alceda cuculoides*

Forest generalist. Older records from the Mara River in July–October, where undoubtedly only a local and rare seasonal visitor. Juveniles observed in July–August (Turner & Pearson 1991).

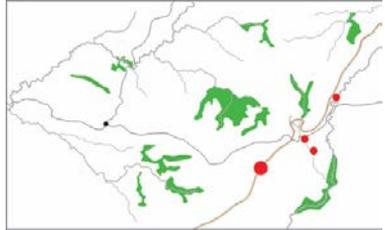


**European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

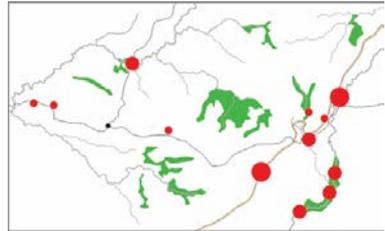
Forest generalist. A scarce Palaearctic passage migrant in the region, with records in November–December and April, up to a maximum of eight birds.

**Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus*

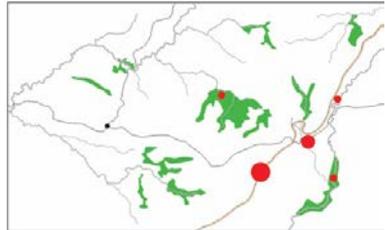
Forest generalist. Very local and rare resident, recorded only from the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment, with records possibly representing only a single pair of birds.

**Western Banded Snake Eagle** *Circaetus cinerascens*

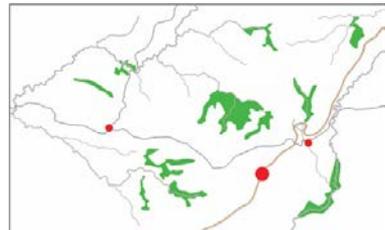
Forest generalist. Singles and pairs are widespread and fairly common residents, reported most often from riverine forest below 1700 m.

**African Goshawk** *Accipiter tachiro*

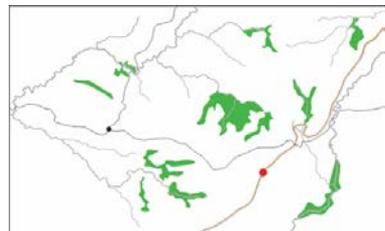
Forest generalist. Local and scarce resident of woodlands and forest edge most often found at 1600–1900 m in the vicinity on the Siria Escarpment.

**Great Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter melanoleucus*

Forest generalist. Singles occurs widely but are very scarce in well wooded and forest edge habitats, possibly only occurring in the region as wanderers.

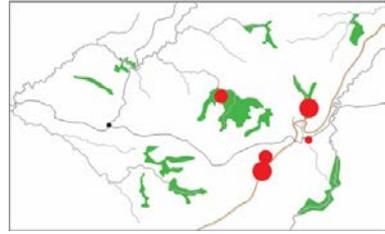
**Mountain Buzzard** *Buteo oreophilus*

Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. One record: 10 February 2015, at 1850 m on the Siria Escarpment. Presumably only a rare wanderer to the region known elsewhere in west Kenya south to the Mau highlands.

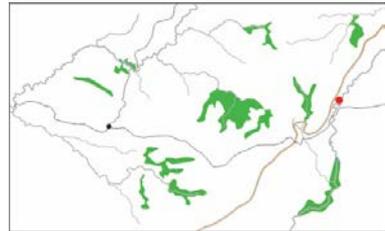


**Crowned Eagle** *Stephanoaetus coronatus*

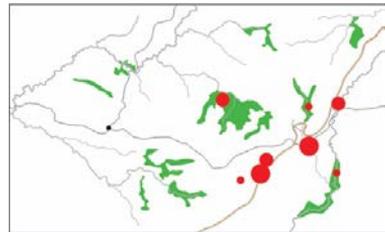
Forest specialist. Very local and uncommon at 1700–1800 m in Nyakweri Forest and the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment. Observed with nest material in April (Finch 2011).

**Buff-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothrura elegans*

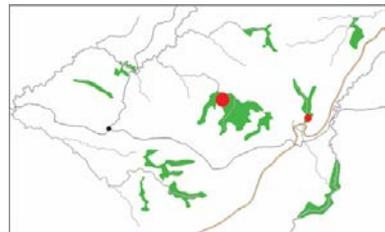
Forest specialist. One record: 14 December 1984 at 1600 m on the Mara River. Presumably only a rare wanderer to the area (Stevenson & Pearson 1986).

**Olive Pigeon** *Columba arquatrix*

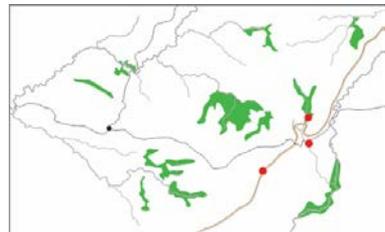
Forest specialist. Local but regularly occurring visitor, primarily along the Siria Escarpment, with all records in March–November.

**Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon** *Columba delegorguei*

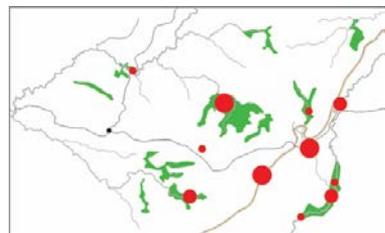
Forest specialist. Very local and scarce visitor (?) primarily to Nyakweri Forest, with records in May and November.

**Lemon Dove** *Aplopelia larvata*

Forest specialist. A rare visitor to forest patches at 1600–1900 m in the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment, with records in January, April and July (Turner & Pearson 1991, B. Finch *in litt.*).

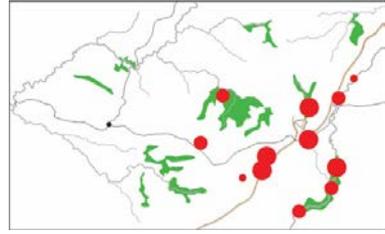
**Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria*

Forest generalist. Widespread and common resident of tall thicket and forest with a dense understorey, occurring from 1600 to 1900 m throughout the region.

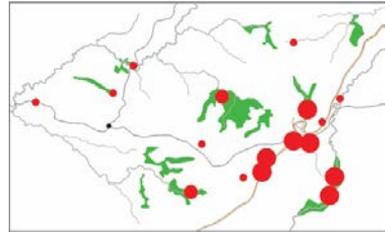


**African Green Pigeon** *Treron calvus*

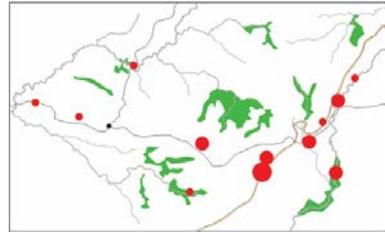
Forest generalist. A common resident from 1550 to 1900m along the Mara River and across eastern areas of the Siria Plateau. The lack of records from western areas below 1700m may reflect heavy deforestation in those areas in past decades.

**Ross's Turaco** *Mussophaga rossae*

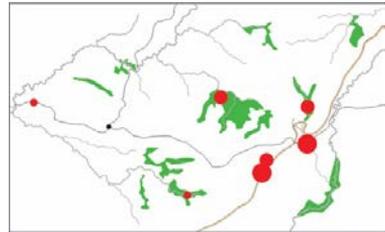
Forest generalist. Widespread and common resident in pairs and small groups from 1550 to 2000m, preferring forest strips and small patches to the forest interior.

**Red-chested Cuckoo** *Cuculus solitarius*

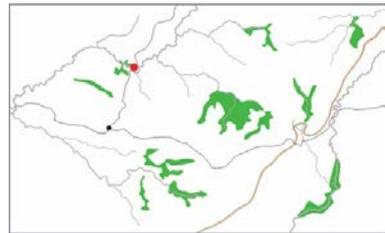
Forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common seasonal visitor to forest edge habitats, with most records in April–June and October–December.

**African Emerald Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx cupreus*

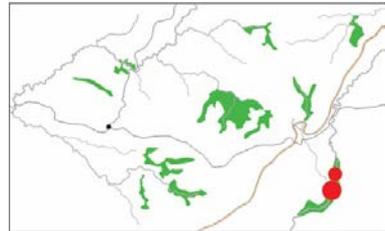
Forest generalist. Widespread but generally uncommon resident (?), mostly above 1700m, and usually detected only when singing in April–May and October–December.

**Yellowbill** *Ceuthmochares aereus*

Forest generalist. Known in the region from one undated record at 1550m on the Migori River. This species is now widely treated as two forms, with ranges roughly divided east and west of the Kenya Rift Valley. The race here is known as the Blue Malkoha in some checklists (D. Turner, pers. comm.).

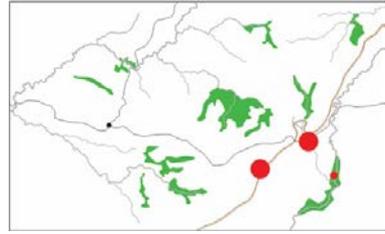
**Pel's Fishing Owl** *Scotopelia peli*

Forest generalist. Very local and rare resident at 1600m along the Mara River. Heard more often than seen but sometimes spotted from hot air balloons. Birds were observed on an active nest in March–April 1994 (Pearson 1978, Pearson & Turner 1998, Turner 1993).

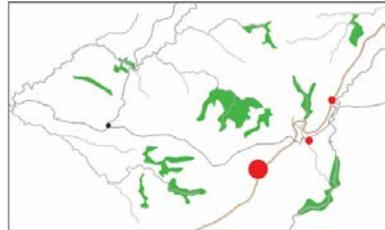


**African Wood Owl** *Strix woodfordii*

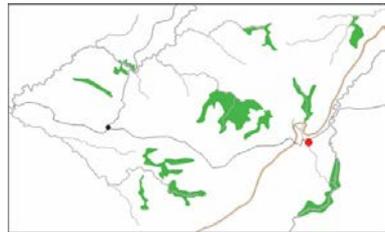
Forest generalist. Local and scarce resident from 1600 to 1900m along the Siria Escarpment. Possibly overlooked elsewhere.

**Montane Nightjar** *Caprimulgus poliocephalus*

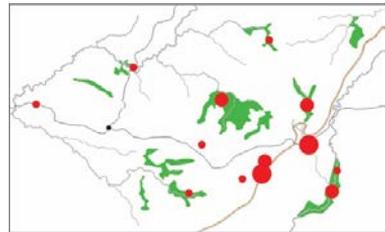
Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. Local and uncommon resident from 1600 to 1900 m along the Siria Escarpment.

**Scarce Swift** *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*

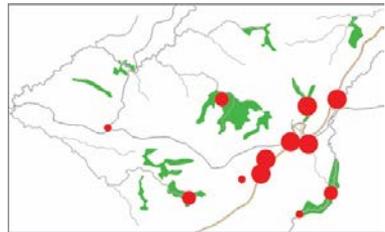
Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. One record: 100+ birds in March 1987 at 1600m over Kichwa Tembo. Presumably only a rare wanderer to the area (Turner & Pearson 1989).

**Narina Trogon** *Apaloderma narina*

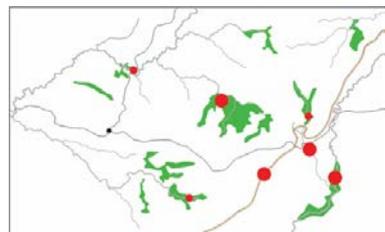
Forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident of forest interior from 1550 to 1900m, often wandering to narrow forest strips or small forest patches.

**Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater** *Merops oreobates*

Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. Widespread and locally common resident of forest edge from 1550 to 1900m, favouring steep valleys and the slopes of the Siria Escarpment.

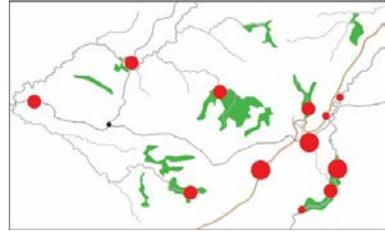
**White-headed Wood-hoopoe** *Phoeniculus bollei*

Forest specialist. A local and uncommon resident above 1750m in Nyakweri Forest and along the Siria Escarpment. Today, it appears to be less numerous in the Mara basin than in the past, possibly reflecting a local contraction in range.



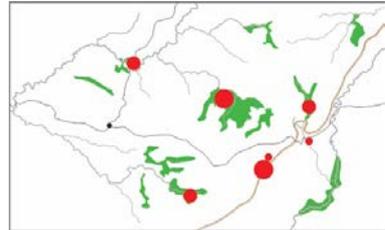
**Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill** *Bycanistes subcylindricus*

Guinea - Congo forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident of riverine forest and well wooded areas from 1550 to 1900m. Typically found in pairs but may gather in numbers at fruiting trees.



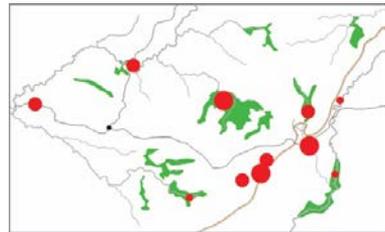
**Grey-throated Barbet** *Gymnobucco bonapartei*

Forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident of forest interior from 1600 to 1900 m, often favouring large and old trees where sometimes gathers in groups of 20 or more birds.



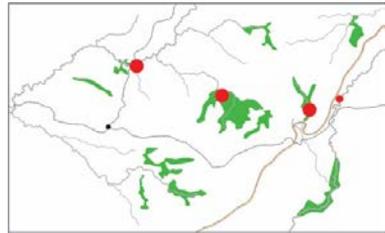
**Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus bilineatus*

Forest generalist. Widespread and common resident of forest interior, edge and well wooded habitats from 1550 to 1900 m, but scarce along the Mara River.



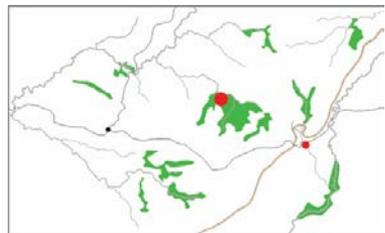
**Yellow-billed Barbet** *Trachylaemus purpuratus*

Guinea-Congo forest generalist. Local and uncommon resident of good forest from 1600 to 1800m, wandering rarely to the Mara River.



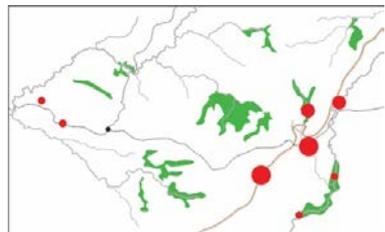
**Least Honeyguide** *Indicator exilis*

Forest specialist. Singles are very local and scarce residents of forest interior from 1700 to 1800 m at Nyakweri Forest, wandering occasionally to the western Maasai Mara. Previously known in west Kenya south to the southwest Mau Forest (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).



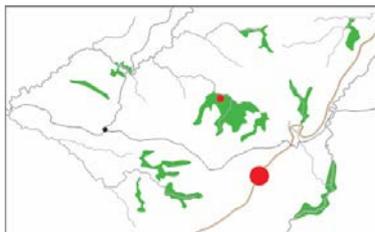
**Golden-tailed Woodpecker** *Campethera abingoni*

Forest generalist. Widespread but generally uncommon resident of forest edge and well wooded habitats around the Siria Escarpment, occasionally found further west towards Migori.

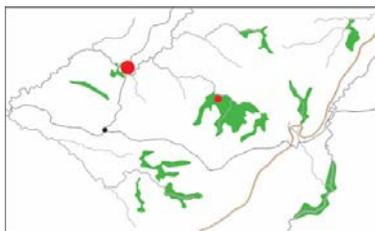


**Fine-banded Woodpecker** *Campethera tullbergi*

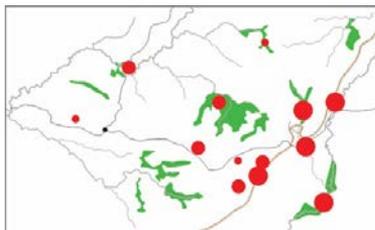
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Very local and rare resident of forest patches above 1800 m on the Siria Escarpment and in Nyakweri Forest. Occurs in the region at the lowest extent of its preferred altitudinal range.

**Black-fronted Bushshrike** *Chlorophoneus nigrifrons*

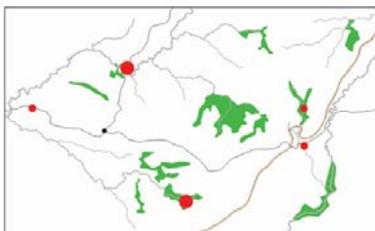
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Pre-1990 records from the Migori River, and more recently at 1750 m in Nyakweri Forest. Presumably a very local and rare resident (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

**Black-backed Puffback** *Dryoscopus cubla*

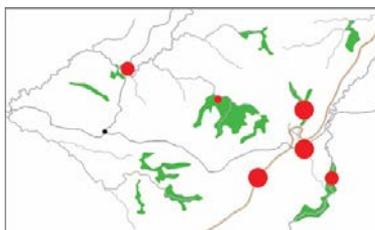
Forest generalist. Widespread and common resident above 1600 m, occurring in wooded and forest habitats. Adults observed feeding nestlings in August (Bennun 1991).

**Lühder's Bushshrike** *Laniarius luehderi*

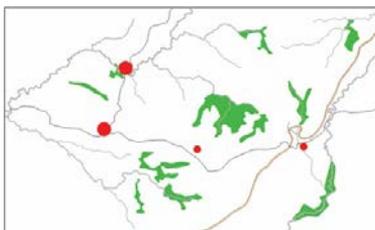
Forest generalist. Pairs are widespread but scarce residents from 1550 to 1850 m, favouring well stratified forest interior and leafy edges. It is only a rare wanderer to the Mara drainage.

**Grey Cuckooshrike** *Coracina caesia*

Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Singles and pairs are widespread but generally uncommon residents from 1600 to 1900 m, occurring in small forest patches and strips, as well as the forest interior. Today, it appears to be less numerous in the Mara basin than in the past, possibly reflecting a local contraction in range.

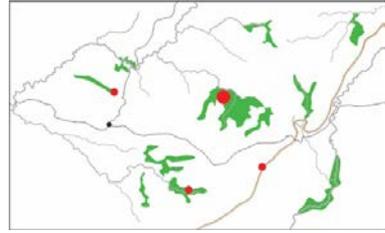
**Purple-throated Cuckooshrike** *Campephaga quis-calina*

Forest specialist. Very local and generally scarce resident of both well wooded and forested habitats at 1600–1900 m, wandering sporadically to the Mara River.



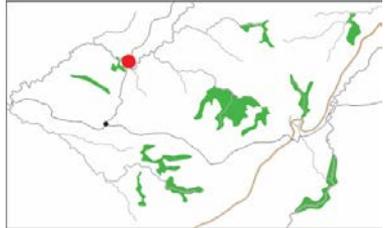
**Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher** *Trochocercus cyanomelas*

Forest specialist. Singles and pairs are very local and scarce residents of forest interior from 1700 to 1900m, favouring a lower midstory and understory with very dense vines. This is a recently discovered population, and a song recorded by J. Bradley in November 2017 is distinct from that of birds in eastern Kenya (Davis *et al.* 2016).



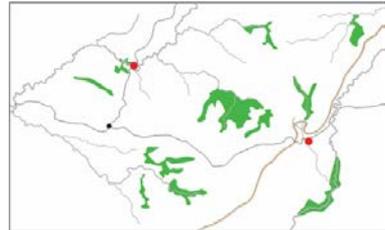
**Chubb's Cisticola** *Cisticola chubbi*

Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. Pre-1993 records from along the Migori River only, where presumably a very local and rare resident (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).



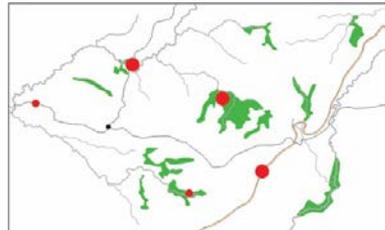
**White-chinned Prinia** *Schistolais leucopogon*

Forest generalist. Observed in October 1991 along the Migori River and known from the Mara basin by a single individual that remained at Kichwa Tembo for at least 5 years in the early 2000s. It may only be a wanderer to the region from forest areas to the north (Turner 1993, B. Finch *in litt.*).



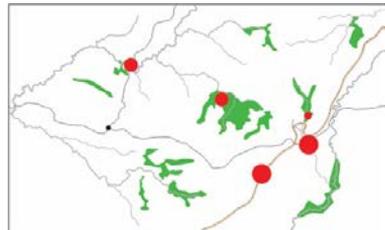
**Buff-throated Apalis** *Apalis rufogularis*

Guinea-Congo forest specialist. Widespread resident from 1550 to 1900m, common in Nyakweri Forest but less so elsewhere. Not previously known in Kenya south of the Kavirondo Rift, and first reported in July 2004 before confirmed with a photograph by S. Hatfield in 2016, and an audio recording by J. Bradley in 2017. (C. Kariuki *in litt.*, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).



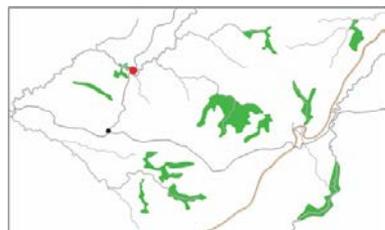
**Grey Apalis** *Apalis cinerea*

Forest specialist. Widespread resident, mostly above 1700m but only locally common. Generally outnumbered by the previous species.



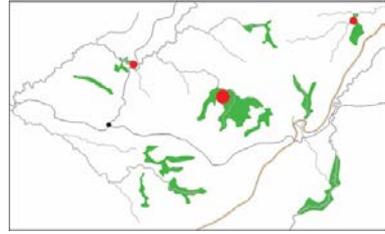
**Black-collared Apalis** *Apalis pulchra*

Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. One record: 7 October 1991 at 1550m on the Migori River. It is possibly only a wanderer to the region from forest areas to the north (Turner 1993).

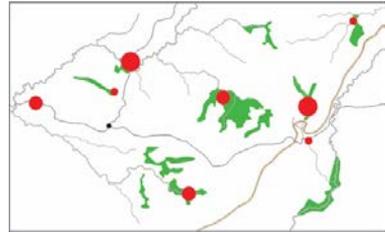


**Black-throated Apalis** *Apalis jacksoni*

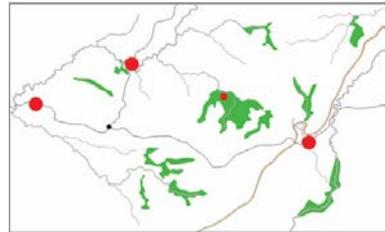
Forest specialist. Very local and rare resident from 1550 to 1850 m, typically favouring the most humid areas within a broader forest habitat.

**Little Greenbul** *Andropadus virens*

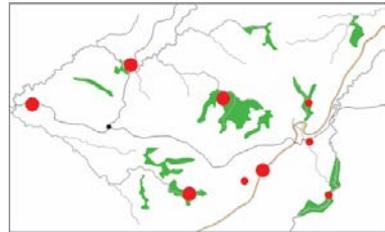
Forest generalist. Widespread resident of forest edge but abundant only below 1800 m in the Migori basin. On occasion, five or more birds can be heard simultaneously, and it may wander to the Mara basin on rare occasions.

**Plain Greenbul** *Andropadus curvirostris*

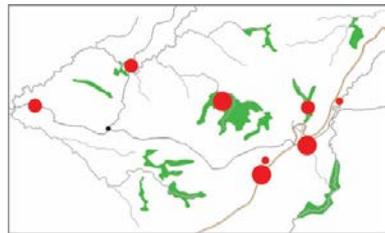
Guinea-Congo forest specialist. Locally rare to uncommon resident from 1550 to 1800 m, favouring the lower-midstory of tall forest. Birds are documented in the region by way of a photograph by S. Carter and an audio recording by J. Williams.

**Yellow-whiskered Greenbul** *Andropadus latirostris*

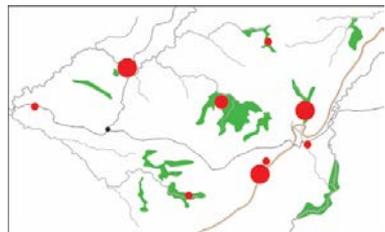
Forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident from 1550 to 1900 m, being most abundant in more humid forest types.

**Slender-billed Greenbul** *Andropadus gracilirostris*

Forest specialist. Widespread and fairly common from 1550 to 1900 m but easily overlooked. Favours the canopy and outer foliage of fruiting forest trees. Nest building observed in May and November.

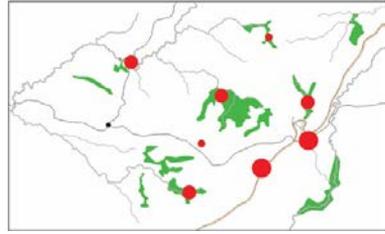
**Joyful Greenbul** *Chlorocichla laetissima*

Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident of good forest from 1550 to 1900 m, with rare wanderers to the Mara basin at Kichwa Tembo. Occurs in groups of 2–6 birds.

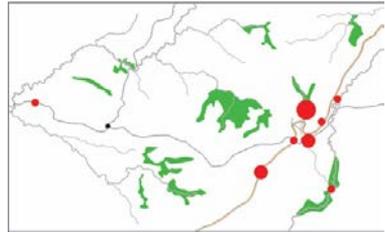


**Cabanis's Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus cabanisi*

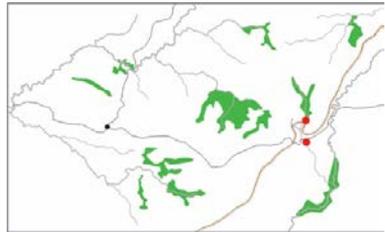
Forest specialist. Pairs and small groups are widespread and common residents of forest and tall thicket from 1550 to 1900m but are absent from riparian forests of the Mara River.

**Yellow-bellied Hyliota** *Hyliota flavigaster*

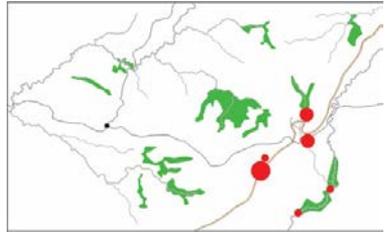
Forest generalist. Local and generally uncommon resident of well wooded habitats, and closely tied to the Siria Escarpment. It is also occasionally found further west towards Migori and an active nest has been observed in July. (B. Finch *in litt.*).

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

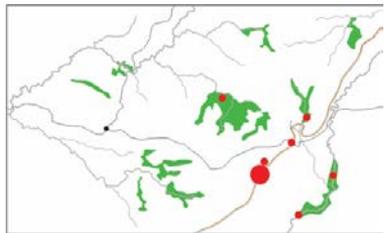
Forest generalist. Single birds on 1–2 January 1989 at c.1700m on the Siria Escarpment and on 7 December 1986 at Kichwa Tembo comprise the only records. Undoubtedly only a rare Palaearctic visitor (Turner & Pearson 1988, 1991).

**Green-capped Eremomela** *Eremomela scotops*

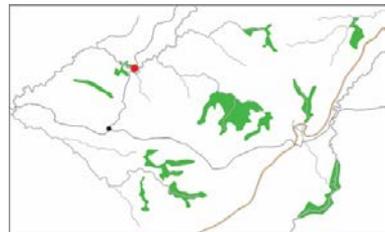
Forest generalist. Very local and uncommon resident of forest edge and well wooded habitats from 1600 to 1900m along the Siria Escarpment, and occasionally along the Mara River. The subspecies present in the area is *E. s. citriniceps*.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Forest generalist. Singles are local and uncommon seasonal visitors from the Palaearctic, inhabiting thicket and forest edge mostly in the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment. Records span primarily November to February.

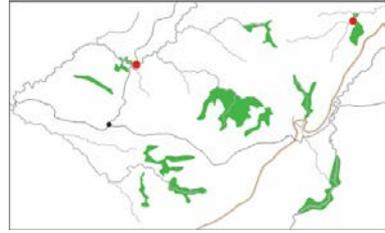
**Mountain Illadopsis** *Illadopsis pyrrhoptera*

Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. One record: August 2004, at 1560m along the Migori River. Presumably a very local and rare resident, known elsewhere in southwest Kenya south to the Kilgoris area, where collected by A. D. Forbes-Watson (B. Finch *in litt.*).

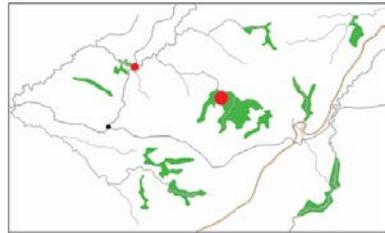


**African Hill Babbler** *Pseudoalcippe abyssinica*

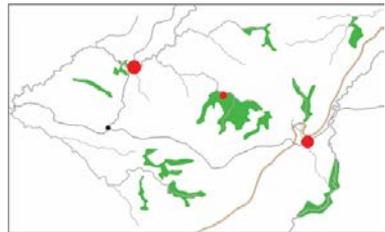
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Older records from 1550 to 1850 m along Migori River and in the northeast of the region. Presumably a very local and rare resident (Turner 1993, Finch 1994).

**Waller's Starling** *Onychognathus walleri*

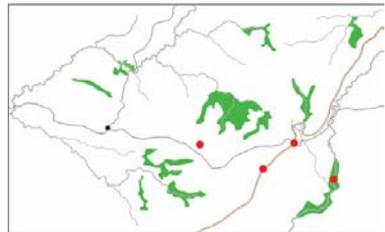
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Pairs are very local and scarce residents of forest interior from 1550 to 1800 m. Known elsewhere in west Kenya south to the Trans Mara and Nguruman forests (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

**Sharpe's Starling** *Pholia sharpii*

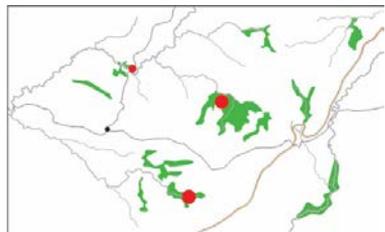
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Very local and scarce resident above 1550 m along the Migori River, reaching the west Maasai Mara only rarely in August–September. Active nest observed from mid June to late July (Bennun 1991, Turner & Pearson 1988, 1991).

**Olive Thrush** *Turdus olivaceous*

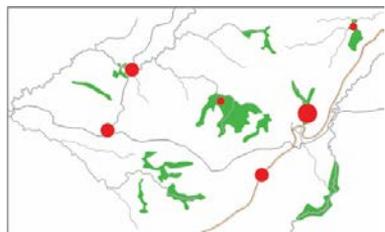
Forest generalist. Very local and scarce resident of bushy and leafy woodlands above 1800 m to the east of Loggorien only, wandering to 1550 m along the Mara River.

**Equatorial Akalat** *Sheppardia aequatorialis*

Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Singles are local and scarce resident of dark understory in mature forest at 1550–1850 m, being absent from the Mara basin. Not previously known in southwest Kenya south of the Mau forests, but photographed in the region by J. Fidorra in 2018 (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

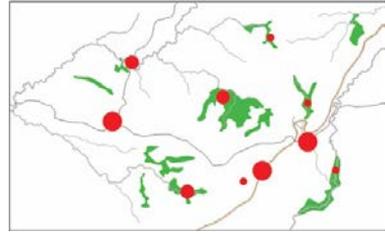
**Grey-winged Robin** *Sheppardia polioptera*

Forest specialist. Singles and pairs are widespread but generally uncommon residents of forest understory from 1550 to 1850 m, commonly occurring along streams and rivers. Observations on the Siria Escarpment in 2018 may have involved birds displaced by deforestation elsewhere nearby.

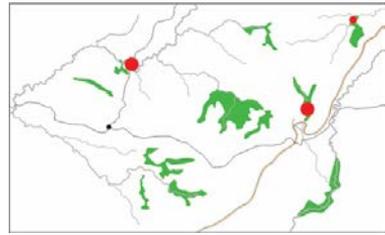


**Red-capped Robin Chat** *Cossypha natalensis*

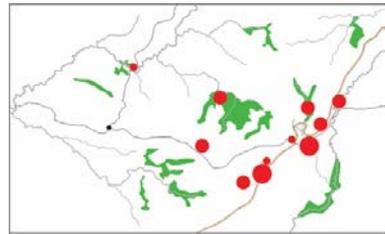
Forest generalist. Widespread and fairly common resident of dense thicket and forest interior throughout. Dependent fledglings observed in February and July (Bennun 1991).

**Snowy-crowned Robin Chat** *Cossypha niveicapilla*

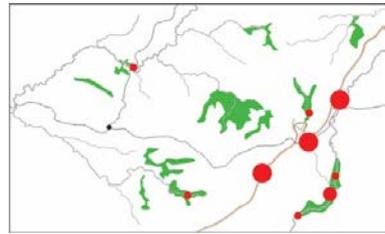
Forest generalist. A very local and scarce resident of good forest, mostly in northern areas of the region covered, and with no records since the late 1990s (Finch 1994).

**White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher** *Melaenornis fischeri*

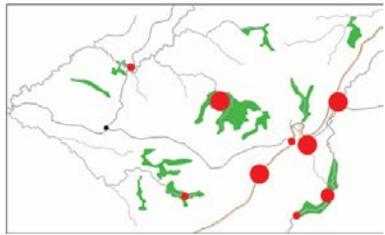
Afrotropical highlands forest generalist. Widespread and common resident of thick woodlands and forest edge from the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment westwards, rarely occurring below 1600m.

**Ashy Flycatcher** *Muscicapa caerulescens*

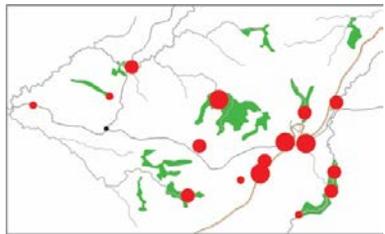
Forest generalist. Pairs are quite local and generally uncommon residents of shady woodlands and riparian forest in the vicinity of the Siria Escarpment and Mara River. Active nest observed in November (B. Finch *in litt.*).

**African Dusky Flycatcher** *Muscicapa adusta*

Forest generalist. Pairs are widespread and fairly common residents of forest edge habitats, primarily above 1600m.

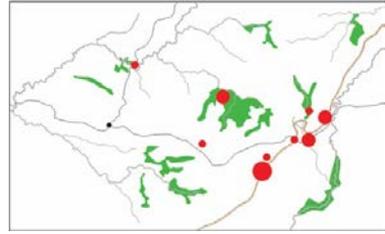
**Collared Sunbird** *Hedydipna collaris*

Forest generalist. Pairs are widespread and common residents of tall thickets, forest interior and edge habitats throughout the region.

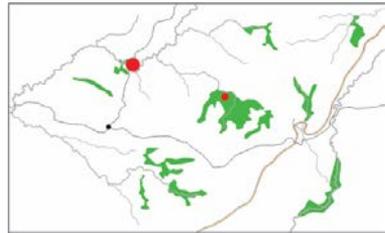


**Green-headed Sunbird** *Cyanomitra verticalis*

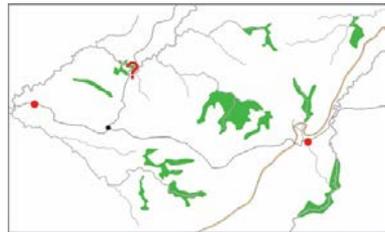
Forest generalist. Widespread but only locally fairly common, favouring moist streamside thickets, humid forest and flower plantings.

**Olive Sunbird** *Cyanomitra olivacea*

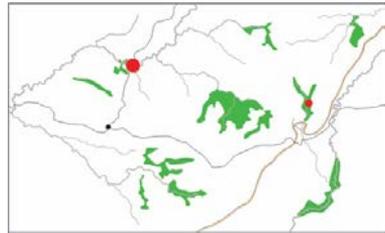
Forest specialist. Pre-1995 records from the Migori River, and more recently at 1750m in Nyakweri Forest. It is probably a rather scarce bird in the region (Zimmerman *et al.*1996).

**Olive-bellied Sunbird** *Cinnyris chloropygius*

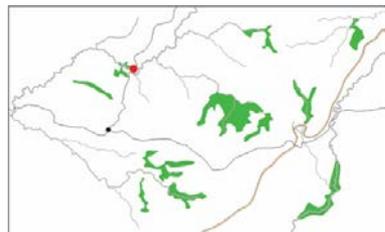
Forest generalist. Single birds are local and scarce residents in the west of the region, with a July record from the western Maasai Mara. Periodic reports of Northern Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris reichenowi* probably refer to this species.

**Brown-capped Weaver** *Ploceus insignis*

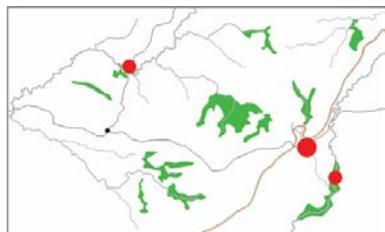
Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Pre-1995 records only, from the Migori River and the Sabarigo Valley, where presumably a very local and rare resident (Finch 1994).

**Grey-headed Negrofinch** *Nigrita canicapillus*

Forest generalist. One record: late January–early February 1992 at 1550m along the Migori River. It is probably a very local and rare resident (Lohding 1992).

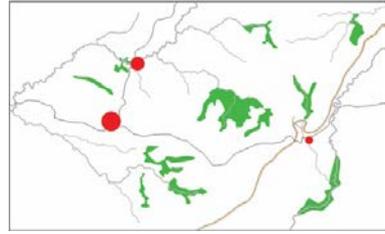
**Green-backed Twinspot** *Mandingoa nitidula*

Forest specialist. Pre-1995 records from the Migori River, and more recently in groundwater forest at Kichwa Tembo and along the Mara River. It is undoubtedly very local and scarce in the region (Finch 1994, Zimmerman *et al.*1996).

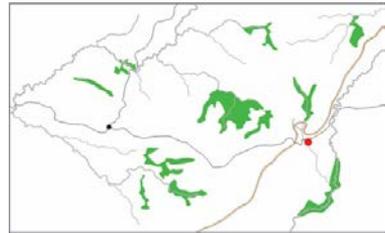


**Red-headed Bluebill** *Spermophaga ruficapilla*

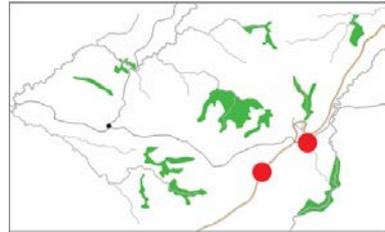
Forest generalist. Old records from forest along the Migori and Mara Rivers, and was formerly reported as resident at Lolgorien. It is now unreported for at least 25 years and possibly locally extirpated (D. Turner pers. comm., Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

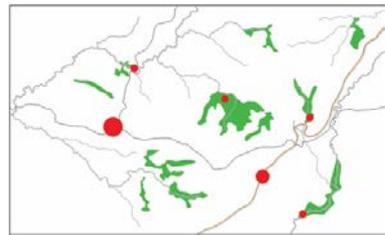
Forest generalist. One record: 30 October 2018 at 1550 m at Kichwa Tembo. It is presumably only a sporadic Palearctic passage migrant in the region.

**Mountain Wagtail** *Motacilla clara*

Forest generalist. Very local resident in small numbers from 1600 to 1900 m, favouring several small streams flowing off the Siria Escarpment.

**Thick-billed Seed eater** *Crithagra burtoni*

Afrotropical highlands forest specialist. Pairs are widespread but generally uncommon residents of humid forest and secondary growth, often seen near water. Active nests observed in May and November (Bennun 1991, Lohding 1992).

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Brian Finch, David Fisher, Chege Kariuki and Adam Scott Kennedy for sharing their observations from the Maasai Mara area on local email lists, as well as the following observers for submitting observations to the online databases eBird and Kenya Birdfinder (records now deposited at eBird): James Beatty, Frank Brown, Simon Carter, Ed Harper, Stratton Hatfield, Peter Headland, Marshall Iliff, Alistair Kilpin, William Marengo, Samantha Musgrave, Jane Tatchell, Julia Williams, the National Museums of Kenya Ornithology Department, and Nature Kenya. We also thank Don Turner and Brian Finch for forwarding to us some additional records from the region, as well as Darcy Ogada and two referees for advice on improving the paper. Lastly, we thank Angama Lodge for providing logistical support on a number of occasions.

**References**

- BENNUN, L.A. 1991. East Africa Natural History Society Nest Record Scheme: 1985–1989. *Scopus* 13(3): 165–180
- BENNUN L.A. 1991b. An avifaunal survey of the Trans-Mara Forest, Kenya. *Scopus* 14: 61–72.

- BENNUN, L.A., DRANZOA, C. & POMEROY, D. 1996. The forest birds of Kenya and Uganda. *Journal of East African Natural History* 85: 23–48.
- BENNUN, L.A. & NJOROGE, P. 1999. *Important Bird Areas in Kenya*. Nairobi: East Africa Natural History Society.
- BRADLEY, J.E., IMBOMA, T. & BRADLEY, D.W. 2015. Birds of Mount Kisingiri, Nyanza Province, including a preliminary survey of the Gwasssi Hills Forest Reserve and a species new to Kenya. *Scopus* 35: 11–38.
- BRADLEY, J.E. 2018. Some noteworthy distributional records from the Gwasssi Hills area, Homa Bay County, Kenya. *Scopus* 38(1): 16–23.
- DAVIS, T., BUTCHART, D. & KILPIN, A. 2016. Discovery of a population of Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas* in the Mara ecosystem. *Scopus* 36(1): 36–37.
- EANHS 2009. *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya*. Nairobi: Ornithological sub-committee, East Africa Natural History Society.
- FINCH, B. W. 1994. Birding in and around the Masai Mara. *Kenya Birds* 3 (2): 57–66.
- FINCH, B. W. 2011. Kenya Mega Birding Tour 2nd to 27th April 2011. Rockjumper Worldwide Birding Adventures. Available: <https://tinyurl.com/yauaff8f> (Accessed: January 9, 2018).
- LOHDING, A. 1992. Transmara revisited after two years. *Kenya Birds* 1 (1): 11–12.
- PEARSON, D.J. 1978. East African Bird Report 1977. *Scopus* 1(5): 116–131.
- PEARSON, D.J. & TURNER, D.A. 1998. Review of Kenya bird records 1992–1996. *Scopus* 20: 65–83.
- STEVENSON, T. & PEARSON, D.J. 1986. East African Bird Report 1984. *Scopus* 8(5): 104–123.
- TURNER, D.A. 1993. East African Bird Report 1991. *Scopus* 15(3): 143–163.
- TURNER, D.A. & PEARSON, D.J. 1988. East African Bird Report 1986. *Scopus* 10(5): 118–132.
- TURNER, D.A. & PEARSON, D.J. 1989. East African Bird Report 1987. *Scopus* 11(5): 102–119.
- TURNER, D.A. & PEARSON, D.J. 1991. East African Bird Report 1989. *Scopus* 13(3): 139–164.
- ZIMMERMAN, D.A., TURNER, D.A. & PEARSON, D.J. 1996. *Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania*. Halfway House, South Africa: Russel Friedman Books.

## Appendix A. Specimen material and online digital media referenced in Species Accounts.

Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher: XC #395871 (Xeno-canto)  
 Buff-throated Apalis: XC #363896, ML#163607701 (Macaulay Library)  
 Plain Greenbul: ML#103563261, ML#102316181  
 Mountain Illadopsis: YPM #069509 (Yale Peabody Museum)  
 Equatorial Akalat: ML#139054551

### James Bradley

7961 East Saanich Rd., Sannichton, BC, V8M 1T4, Canada. Email: [james\\_bradley@ymail.com](mailto:james_bradley@ymail.com)

### Tyler Davis

P.O. Box 2049, Karen, Nairobi 05002, Kenya. Email: [fishingowl@gmail.com](mailto:fishingowl@gmail.com)

*Scopus* 39(2): 9–26, July 2019

Received 1 March 2019