

CONSERVATION ASPECTS OF JACKSON'S WIDOWBIRD *Euplectes jacksoni* IN MAU NAROK/MOLO GRASSLANDS, INTERIM REPORT

Josephine Nzilani and Geoffrey Mwangi: National Museums of Kenya, Department of Ornithology, P. o. Box 40658, GPO 00100 Nairobi-Kenya. Tel. +254-02-3742121/61 ext 242/3. Fax 374124, 3741049

Email: mwajeffa@yahoo.com / jzylani@yahoo.com

Summary

Between 16th to 29th December 2006, we carried out a survey to determine the population status of Jackson's Widowbird in Mau Narok /Molo Grasslands, Central Kenya. A total of 13 plots were surveyed. 535 individual birds were recorded constituting 54 species. 7 Palearctic migrants and 6 (Six) afro-tropical migrants were recorded. Jackson's Widowbird was encountered 7 times during the survey, 3 of the encounters were inside the study plots. Jackson's Widowbird flock sizes varied in size, between 10-30 individuals. The species was recorded regularly in green wheat fields, suggesting preference to ripe (but not dry) grains of wheat. In two of the flocks (numbering approximately 10 individuals each), 2 breeding males were observed. This probably suggests that the breeding season had just ended (a separate survey recorded more than 30 breeding males in a period of 10 days in September 2006).

Avifauna

Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris*, was the most common species, recorded in 11 of the 13 plots surveyed. Other common species included; Aberdare Cisticola *Cisticola aberdare* (9), Baglafetch Weaver *Ploceus baglafecht* (9), Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur* (8), Hunter's Cisticola *Cisticola hunteri* (8), Red-eyed dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* (8), Streaky Seadeater *Serinus striolatus* (8), Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* (7).

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* had the highest population size (66) followed by Jackson's Widowbird (50). Others included Streaky Seadeater *Serinus striolatus* (47), Hunter's Cisticola (44), Aberdare Cisticola (38), Grassland Pipit (28), Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* (22) and Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata* (21).

Jackson's Widowbird

Jackson's Widowbird occurred in 3 plots and ranked 13th in the list of most common species. It was recorded 3 times in different study plots and four times elsewhere (mostly in wheat farms). A total number of 50 individuals were recorded in the study plots. In four different encounters outside the study plots, a total number of 80 individuals were counted. In the whole study period, a total of 130 individuals were counted, with only two breeding males recorded. The species was observed to be

highly mobile and appeared to prefer green wheat farms with ripe grains compared to fields with dry wheat or harvested fields. In one of the encounters, Jackson's Widowbird alternated between feeding in a green wheat field and courting in tussock grasslands.

Grasslands quality and its implications on Jackson's Widowbird and other bird species

Grasslands now remain along sloping valleys; probably because agricultural machinery cannot access them and the Maasai community set aside pieces of land for grazing, mainly along these valleys. A few regenerating grasslands were also observed, previously burnt or occupied by wheat/barley. Considerable areas of remnant grasslands exist, and appear to hold significant populations of grassland birds.

In a previous separate survey in which the authors of this report participated, Jackson's Widowbird were found displaying on these remnant grasslands. Two nests were also recorded. The nests were conical in shape and were located in dense tussocks, approximately 15cm above ground.

Although the species appear to be favoured by cultivation of wheat (feeding grounds), tussock grasslands are vital for courtship and nesting. Therefore removal of grasslands will be detrimental to the species survival.

Some of the areas that once contained large patches of pristine grasslands (Ndang'ang'a and Mulwa, 2003) have now been replaced by barley and wheat (e.g. Ol Chorro and Olokurto).

List of all bird species recorded during the survey

Species	Scientific Name	Migratory status	Total # indiv.	# plots where occurred
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>		66	8
Jackson's Widowbird	<i>Euplectes jacksoni</i>		50	3
Streaky Seedeater	<i>Serinus striolatus</i>		47	8
Hunter's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola hunteri</i>		44	8
Aberdare Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aberdare</i>		38	9
Grassland Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>		28	7
Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>		22	1
Capped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pileata</i>		21	6
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		20	6
Common Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>		19	11
Dusky Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia lugens</i>		18	1
Golden-winged Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia reichenowi</i>	AM	15	2
Baglafetch Weaver	<i>Ploceus baglafecht</i>		12	9
Black-headed Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>		12	2
Northern Anteater chat	<i>Myrmecocichla aethiops</i>		10	2
Brimstone Canary	<i>Serinus sulphuratus</i>		10	1
Sharpe's Longclaw	<i>Macronyx sharpei</i>		9	2
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>		8	3
Augur Buzzard	<i>Buteo augur</i>		7	8
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>		7	4
Rufous Sparrow	<i>Passer rufocinctus</i>		7	3

Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius Striatus</i>		7	2
Yellow-billed Duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>	AM	5	2
Tropical Boubou	<i>Laniarius ruficeps</i>		5	1
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	PM	4	3
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	AM	4	2
African Citril	<i>Serinus citrinelloids</i>		3	2
Cape Rook	<i>Corvus capensis</i>		3	2
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>		3	2
Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>		3	2
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba giunea</i>		3	2
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	AM,PM	2	2
Blacksmith Plover	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>		2	2
Common Quail	<i>Cortunix cortunix</i>		2	2
Malachite Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia famosa</i>		2	1
Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceous</i>		2	1
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quellea Quellea Aethiopica</i>	AM	2	1
White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis fischeri</i>		2	1
Bronze Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia kilimensis</i>		1	1
Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater	<i>Merops oreobates</i>		1	1
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda quartinia</i>		1	1
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptus</i>		1	1
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	AM,PM	1	1
Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>		1	1
Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>		1	1
Lavaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>		1	1
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	PM	1	1
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>		1	1
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	PM	1	1
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	PM	0	0
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		0	0
Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>		0	0
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	PM	0	0
Yellow-Crowned Canary	<i>Serinus citrinelloids</i>		0	0

Migration status

AM Afrotropical migrant

PM Palaearctic migrant

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