

Somaliland: Abdi Jama

Status of Conservation Projects

In Somaliland, there really is no conservation effort worth the name. Sacada Din & Ceebad, two very important sites for seabirds near the Djibouti border are being developed for a major tourism / scuba diving project. As the project has been coming along seemingly nicely, both islands got sold off to developers from next door Djibouti. Pylons and booms are already in place around both islands and the construction of resorts is not far behind.



The effect on the birdlife would be devastating especially in Ceebaad where huge flocks of Swift Terns, White-Eyed and Sooty gulls breed. Another IBA, Gacan Libaax Mountain, a picturesque Afro-Montane site that has a relatively healthy Juniper forest (which is important for the endemic Somali Blackbird, *T. ludovicae* and the semi-endemic Archer"s and Chestnut-Naped Francolins, *P. castaneicollis*) is being severely degraded by the invasion of nomadic herders. Even the Boorame Plains IBA is becoming an eyesore from overgrazing and over cultivation. The degradation of this unique site is continuous. There is even a small-scale project to extract forest edge juniper stands

Conservation Concerns

Unfortunately galore. There is a fearsome deforestation going on and large tracts of land in Somaliland is being cleared of the great variety of acacia trees that I used to know as a nomadic pastoralist.

Significant Bird Sightings / Discoveries

In recent trips around Somaliland searching for vultures on behalf the ABC, I had the unique fortune of coming across some endemic and hard to see birds that I have always read about: Lesser Hoopoe, *A. hamertoni*, Short-Tailed, *P. freemantlii*, Somali-Short-Toed, *C. somalica*, and Somali, *M. somalica*, Larks as well as Philippa's Crombec, *S. philippae* and gorgeous Red-Naped Bush-Shrike, *L. ruficeps*. There is a Scops Owl species of uncertain affinities on Daallo Forest Reserve. It's smaller than the African and is about the size of the Socotra. Even vocalization is unlike any other known Scops Owl ssp. Along with Mr Hannes Uhlig of Germany we encountered two bird species whose range was not supposed to extend to Somaliland: Pink-Breasted Lark and Augur Buzzard (lower image).



New Contacts with other Bird Clubs

There are no Bird Clubs in Somaliland but plenty of bird thieves and smugglers (to the Arabian countries). Our human development stage is at the survival level. Interest in or concerns about birds and their habitats is of least concern to our society. I am just a mad person with my binos, camera and bird books flailing about his side. Attitude here is that if one is not capturing birds to sell to Arab collectors, what else is there to do with them? The good news that we have been getting through to the public on the conservation of our birds and other wild life. By going on air both radio and television and visiting schools, we at Nature Somaliland are finally managing to dilute the ignorance about birdlife conservation. Still unfortunately, for a few hundred dollars at a time, the Ministry of range issues permits Arab collectors and falconers to decimate our bustards despite a new law that prohibits hunting and / or collecting of any kind of wildlife in our country. Birding in Somaliland has been full of harassment with even some arrests thrown in. But it's delightful to engage people about birds, their tribes, sub-tribes, world-wide, Africa and Somaliland numbers; the resident species and the magic of migration involving some of the birds. And how as their habitats degrade, the birds themselves disappear followed by other types of life form eventually including humans.

The public attitude is definitely improving on bird conservation. We have been fortunate to be able to bring in birding tourists; so we are out in the bush much more often. People can see tourism brings employment and hence it makes sense not to abuse wildlife and its habitat.

I am no longer a strange site around the country. My new nick name "Shimbiraale", meaning „bird man" in K-Somali.

Promotional Activity for ABC (e.g. talks)

Nature Somaliland has been busy establishing a relationship with a British-curriculum primary school in Hargeisa. We want to introduce basic habitat-types and the birds (and other wildlife) that live in them. In these types of schools, the curriculum is more liberal compared to Madrasas (conservative religious schools) which dominate our education system, unfortunately. This outreach to schools has been going well with Bloom school system. We hope to assemble twenty to thirty binoculars and the same number of bird books for group outings.

Other Concerns or Issues

Just as in most African countries, which I have lived in or visited from South Africa to the Sudan, Somaliland's natural environment is in serious trouble. Mainly the explosion of the human population is the culprit and it's getting more crowded here every year. The big ship we call Africa is headed in the wrong direction and I just do not see how things could turn around short or long term. I believe the able few will keep running off to Europe or the Arabian countries and the vast majority will perish in environmental-abuse related droughts and warfare. Period. Nothing out there working properly. The so called educated bunch, the ruling groups are just pure thieves. Our once bountiful environment is devoid of trees and bushes and everything is washing off to the Gulf of Aden during those infrequent rainstorms. Among other creatures, our birdlife is in great jeopardy. Still very true observation, unfortunately.