



Ostrich

Journal of African Ornithology

ISSN: 0030-6525 (Print) 1727-947X (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tost20>

A response to Gatali and Wallin (2015) Bird diversity in the savanna habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period

James WT Hogg & Gaël R Vande weghe

To cite this article: James WT Hogg & Gaël R Vande weghe (2017) A response to Gatali and Wallin (2015) Bird diversity in the savanna habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period, *Ostrich*, 88:1, 83-88, DOI: [10.2989/00306525.2017.1290704](https://doi.org/10.2989/00306525.2017.1290704)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.2989/00306525.2017.1290704>



Published online: 10 Mar 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 40



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Comment

A response to Gatali and Wallin (2015) Bird diversity in the savanna habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period

James WT Hogg^{1*} and Gaël R Vande weghe²

¹ Scarth Wood Farm, Swainby, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, UK

² Illume Creative Studio, Kigali, Rwanda

* Corresponding author, email: jwthogg@googlemail.com

The paper 'Bird diversity in the savanna habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period' by Gatali and Wallin (*Ostrich* 86(3): 267–276, 2015) makes several claims for new species records for Akagera National Park and Rwanda. We found that Gatali and Wallin recorded several species considered very rare in Rwanda and new discoveries; these findings often contradicted the existing literature. We doubt the validity of 34 species records and we aim to demonstrate that these claims are mostly the result of misidentification or human error and consider that future researchers should use their findings with caution. Some findings around more common species may be validated through further studies and we encourage others to conduct fieldwork in Akagera National Park.

Une réponse à Gatali et Wallin (2015) Diversité des oiseaux dans les habitats de savane du parc national de l'Akagera, au Rwanda, durant la réhabilitation de l'après-guerre

L'article «Diversité des oiseaux dans les habitats de savane du parc national de l'Akagera, au Rwanda, durant la réhabilitation de l'après-guerre» de Gatali et Wallin (*Ostrich* 86 (3): 267–276, 2015), affirme la découverte de plusieurs nouvelles espèces pour le parc national de l'Akagera et pour le Rwanda. Plusieurs de ces espèces sont considérées comme étant très rare au Rwanda, et certaines observations seraient inédites pour le pays. Ces résultats contredisent la littérature existante et nous doutons de la validité de 34 espèces. Nous cherchons à démontrer que ces résultats sont le plus souvent dus à des erreurs d'identification ou à des erreurs humaines et considérons que les futurs chercheurs devraient utiliser leurs résultats avec prudence. Certains résultats concernant des espèces plus courantes peuvent être validés au moyen d'études supplémentaires et nous encourageons d'autres personnes à effectuer des travaux de terrain dans le parc national de l'Akagera.

Keywords: Akagera National Park, bird diversity, corrigenda, East Africa, Rwanda

The paper 'Bird diversity in the savanna habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period' by Gatali and Wallin (2015) makes several claims for new species records for Akagera National Park (ANP) and Rwanda. We have identified several potential errors in that paper, we think that their species list in some instances is not accurate and that future researchers should use their findings with caution.

Akagera National Park has been extensively surveyed in the past, many visitors report interesting sightings through various means and the species list for the park is fairly well established. The Vande weghe family lived within the park for several years in the 1980s and 1990s and are very familiar with its birds and other flora and fauna. Their publication on the birds of Rwanda (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011) should be considered a robust and thorough benchmark.

We have used various field guides, publications and extensive experience to evaluate the claims made by Gatali

and Wallin (2015). We found that Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded several species considered very rare in Rwanda and new discoveries; these often contradicted the existing literature. Furthermore, these observations were often not justified; one exception is the Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*, where a photograph is presented.

We doubt the validity of 34 species records and we aim to demonstrate that these claims are mostly the result of misidentification or human error. It may be possible to validate some findings through further studies and we encourage others to conduct fieldwork in ANP.

Comments on unusual species reported by Gatali and Wallin (2015)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

The International Ornithological Congress (IOC) World Bird List accepts the split between Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

and Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* (Gill and Donsker 2012). According to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011), there are very few confirmed records for *M. migrans*, yet *M. aegyptius* is very common in Rwanda, though rarely seen over large forest blocks or in ANP. Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded *M. migrans* seven times, but no *M. aegyptius*. These two species are difficult to separate in the field and the split is not treated fully in Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003).

It seems likely that the birds recorded by Gatali and Wallin (2015) were *M. aegyptius* as opposed to *M. migrans*.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

There have been few confirmed sightings of this bird in Rwanda according to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) and the species is considered an irregular visitor because the bulk of *A. nipalensis* migration takes place east of Rwanda.

However, Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* is known to be fairly common in Rwanda and that species could be easily confused with *A. nipalensis*. The common field guides differ in their illustrations. Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) only depict one colour morph for Tawny Eagle. Sinclair and Ryan (2010) show various Tawny Eagle under-wing colour morphs that should encourage caution separating *A. rapax* and *A. nipalensis* during the Palaearctic migration. We would expect to note one Steppe Eagle for every 20 (or more) Tawny Eagle sightings, i.e. a ratio of 1:20. In Gatali and Wallin (2015) this ratio is closer to 1:2.

Steppe Eagle could be easily confused with Tawny Eagle, which is the more likely option for these records.

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*

Recorded on two occasions by Gatali and Wallin (2015). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) mention four previous sightings in ANP: 1952, 1971, 1972 and 1986. Hence the frequency of Gatali and Wallin's sightings seem high. Verreaux's Eagle is normally found in areas with cliffs and normally relies on these features for nest sites. There are few, if any, suitable cliffs in ANP, hence any records are visitors. These records are doubted.

Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus*

Recorded on one occasion by Gatali and Wallin (2015). This species is almost identical in appearance to the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur chalcospilos*. Wing spot colour may be an aid to identification. However, using the colour of the wing spots is not always a suitable way to identify this bird because the spots are iridescent and can appear different shades depending on light conditions.

Though there is some overlap between *T. abyssinicus* and *T. chalcospilos* in the east of their range, *T. abyssinicus* favours drier areas, i.e. northern Uganda. If it was genuinely present in ANP, then it should be expected that vagrants are regularly observed throughout other parts of Uganda.

This is most likely a misidentification of *Turtur chalcospilos* or a transcription error and the record is highly doubted.

Yellow-throated Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx flavigularis*

This secretive forest bird is found in the Congo basin and West African forests, hence finding it in a savanna environment far outside its normal range is unusual. It favours the

high canopy of forest and that habitat is entirely absent from ANP. The closest known localities are Semeliki and Maramagambo in Uganda approximately 260 km to the north. In any case, this record is highly doubtful.

African Black Swift *Apus barbatus*

This species is not easily separated from Eurasian Swift *Apus apus*, a species not recorded in this study. However, Eurasian Swift is known to be abundant during the Palaearctic migration season, and there are records of immature birds from June and July (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). This species has not been seen recently at ANP. Therefore, it is considered likely that these records are misidentifications.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*

There are two known records of this species in Rwanda according to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011). The records date from 1959 and 1969 when there was more extensive riparian forest in Rwanda. The species is known from the Ruvubu Valley in Burundi and it is not inconceivable that a bird has come from there.

However, an observer could conceivably confuse this species with the Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*. Though possible, this record is considered dubious.

Black-backed Barbet *Lybius minor*

There are no known records of this species for Rwanda (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). According to the field guides (Sinclair and Ryan (2012) and Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) it is present in West Africa and closer to Rwanda it is known from Burundi and western Tanzania. It is uncommon and inhabits riverine forest, forest edge and thickets. This species is reported from Ruvubu National Park in Burundi in riverine forest. It is possible that a bird from there could have made its way to Rwanda. However, the majority of native forests in-between ANP and Ruvubu National Park have been cut down or degraded, hence the pathway remains unclear.

It should be difficult for an observer to misidentify this species, as it has a distinctive appearance. We doubt this record and its validity requires further evidence.

Black-billed Barbet *Lybius guifsobalito*

This species has never been recorded in Rwanda. The bird is almost identical in appearance to the Red-faced Barbet *Lybius rubrifacies*, which is known to be present. Britton (1980), Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) show no overlap in distribution between the two species, the latter two publications clearly stating it within the text. Distribution maps within the field guides show a decent gap between the ranges of the two species.

It seems highly likely therefore that this is an error in identification and recording. We therefore consider this record invalid.

Yellow-throated Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus subsulphureus*

This species has never been recorded in Rwanda. It is known from Uganda and West Africa where, according to Sinclair and Ryan (2010), it inhabits 'mature forest, gallery forest and secondary growth', a habitat not present in ANP.

It is likely that this is a misidentification of Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus* or a human error in recording names.

We consider this observation highly unlikely and requiring further evidence.

Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*

This was previously a doubted record in Rwanda (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). However, Gatali and Wallin (2015) have provided photographic evidence for this species and the photograph does also appear to confirm previous records of vocalisations.

However, it is not so clear-cut, as Vande weghe (1992) stated:

Bennett's Woodpecker *Campethera bennettii*. This species is one of the commonest woodpeckers in eastern Rwanda (Akagera NP) and also occurs throughout the year in dense acacia woodlands near Murema Hill in southernmost Uganda. All birds seen in Rwanda and southern Uganda are typical Bennett's according to plumage, but their voice is quite similar to that of Nubian Woodpecker *C. nubica*, and does not sound like that of Bennett's from farther south, in Zimbabwe, for example. Clearly, the contact between these two woodpeckers needs more study.

This observation does pose some questions, with regards to the interface of *C. nubica* and *C. bennettii* in Rwanda that warrants further investigation.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

This is an irregular visitor to Rwanda (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011), with only a handful of sightings. It could easily be confused with Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*, which is seen regularly. Gatali and Wallin (2015) do not give the date of the sighting, hence it is not possible to verify that the bird was recorded during the Palaearctic migrant season.

Though previously observed in Rwanda, this record is doubted.

Brown-necked Parrot *Poicephalus robustus*

Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) note that there have been occasional observations of Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus suahelicus* in Volcanoes National Park in the north-west of Rwanda, but nowhere else.

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this bird 17 times, with a ratio of approximately 1:3 to Meyer's Parrot *Poicephalus meyeri*, the latter recorded 52 times. The frequency of Gatali and Wallin's (2015) observations suggest that *P. robustus* should be a fairly common bird. However, there have been, to our knowledge, no other reports of this bird in ANP.

A strong possibility is transcription error by observers due to the similarity of common names. With no other records before, during or after this study, the records contained within are doubted without further evidence.

Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis*

This species is known from similar habitats in the region, but Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) have not recorded the species in ANP, and state that in Rwanda it favours more humid and high-altitude areas. This species is incredibly

similar to the Black-backed Puffback *D. cubla*, which is very common in the park, and immature *D. cubla* does resemble *D. gambensis*. These observations seem unlikely.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) follow a 2005 split, as used by the IOC World Bird List, that separates Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius phoeicuriodes* from *L. isabellinus* (Gill and Donsker 2012). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) have no known records for *L. isabellinus* and state that *L. phoeicuriodes* is an occasional visitor. Hence, Gatali and Wallin (2015) do not seem to have considered what is the most likely post-split species. Secondly, *L. phoeicuriodes* is seldom seen in Rwanda and could be easily confused with immature birds belonging to other shrike species, so the record is doubted.

Mountain Oriole *Oriolus percivali*

Named Black-tailed Oriole in Gatali and Wallin (2015), this species is only known in Rwanda from high-altitude forest blocks of the Congo-Nile divide (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). This is a bird of high-altitude montane forest according to Britton (1980), Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010). Hence it is considered highly unlikely that this bird was found in a savanna habitat.

It seems likely that this is a misidentification of the almost identical Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus larvatus*. This error is commonly seen on lists submitted from the park. As such we consider the record invalid.

Velvet-mantled Drongo *Dicrurus modestus*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species five times in ANP. The preferred habitat of the species according to Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) is forest, gallery forest and plantations. The larger part of its range is across the Congo basin into West Africa, with smaller populations in the forested areas of Uganda. It is known in Rwanda from Nyungwe National Park, a montane rainforest in the west of the country (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011).

The type of habitat preferred by this species is absent in ANP. Gatali and Wallin (2015) note that this species is difficult to distinguish from Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, a very common species in ANP (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011), though no evidence or justification is presented to strengthen their claim.

The records are most likely misidentification of *D. adsimilis*. As such we consider the record invalid.

Dusky-blue Flycatcher *Muscicapita comitata*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species once. In the appendix to their paper they classify this species as belonging to the Monarchidae family, whereas it should be placed in Muscicapidae.

Britton (1980), Stevenson and Fanshawe (2002) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) state that this is a forest bird. The principal range of this species is the Congo basin and West African forests. This species is found reasonably close to Rwanda in Uganda, but suitable habitat is not present in ANP.

This species could be easily misidentified as several of the grey flycatchers, i.e. Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapita caerulescens*

or even Grey Tit-flycatcher *Myioparus plumbeus*. We consider this record highly unlikely.

Plain Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris*

Alternative name: Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Eurillas curvirostris*. This species was recorded on one occasion by Gatali and Wallin (2015). Elsewhere in Rwanda this species is only found in Nyungwe Forest (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). Britton (1980), Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) all state that this is a forest species.

We think it highly unlikely that a forest species should be found in a savanna environment. This is likely to be a misidentification of Cabanis's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cabanisi* or Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Andropadus latirostris*, both known from ANP in the more tangled, wooded sections along the lake shores (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). We therefore consider this record invalid.

Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne pristoptera*

This species was recorded several times by Galati and Wallin (2015). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that this species is only found in the west of Rwanda along the highland forest blocks of the Congo-Nile Divide. Stevenson and Fanshawe (2002) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) state this is a bird of forest edges and clearings often near streams.

The White-headed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne albiceps* is by comparison widespread in Rwanda, found in a range of habitats and often seen over swamps and grasslands. Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) state 'Imm *P. albiceps* is all dull dark brown with a slightly paler throat (which is difficult to see in the field)', i.e it resembles a Black Saw-wing. Without supplementary evidence, it is therefore highly likely that the records in Gatali and Wallin (2015) for Black Saw-wing are misidentifications of young White-headed Saw-wing. Black Saw-wing is considered highly unlikely.

Chubb's *Cisticola Cisticola chubbi*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species numerous times ($n = 53$) across the park. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that this bird is absent from the semi-arid areas in eastern Rwanda, i.e ANP. It has been recorded uncommonly in eastern Rwanda where riparian forest and lush scrub vegetation are present, though according to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) there are no records within the park itself. The records by Gatali and Wallin (2015) are feasible, in some moister areas in the park. However, it has been recorded at a high frequency across the park. A handful of records in suitable habitats would be more likely. Although cisticolas can be challenging to identify, this is a well-known and conspicuous species unlikely to have been missed in the past. The frequency of the records is considered unlikely.

Miombo Wren-warbler/Pale Wren-warbler *Calamonastes undosus*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) have reported both Miombo Wren-warbler and Pale Wren-warbler in their study, using the same scientific name for both.

There seems to be some confusion around naming. Only one species is present in Rwanda and Gatali and Wallin (2015) appear to have double-counted the same species.

Singing *Cisticola Cisticola cantans*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species 13 times across the park. It is feasible that this species was missed in the past as there has been a recent record from Akagera Game Lodge within the park. However, the frequency at which the species was recorded by Gatali and Wallin (2015) is doubted.

Whistling *Cisticola Cisticola lateris*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species on one occasion. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) shows no records for Rwanda. Gael Vande weghe has spent a lot of time looking for cisticolas in ANP and has never recorded this species (he is familiar with it from Gabon and Congo). It cannot be separated from Trilling Cisticola *Cisticola woosnami* on sight, but the vocalisations are distinctive and should not have been previously missed by experienced observers. This record is highly doubted.

Stuhlmann's Starling *Poepetera stuhlmanni*

This species was recorded twice by Gatali and Wallin (2015). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state the species is only present in the montane forests in western Rwanda. Britton (1980), Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003) and Sinclair and Ryan (2010) state this is a species of highland forests. It is very unlikely that a range-restricted forest bird would be found in a savanna habitat. This is probably a misidentification and the records are considered invalid.

Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*

The IOC World Bird List split this species; Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus* is restricted to southern Africa, and Abyssinian Thrush *Turdus abyssinicus* is found in East Africa (Gill and Donsker 2012). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that African Thrush *T. pelios* is found through the majority of Rwanda, including ANP, and that *T. abyssinicus* is found in the country but only in the higher-altitude mountainous areas in western Rwanda.

Thus, the correct name is Abyssinian Thrush and records of *T. abyssinicus* in ANP are considered highly unlikely.

African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species seven times across all parts of the park. Gael Vande weghe has observed this species around Akagera Game Lodge in the south of the park. It is, however, rare elsewhere in the park as the conditions do not seem damp enough.

Gatali and Wallin (2015) have no records for Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. This species is a common Palaearctic migrant and visitor to Rwanda according to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011). It seems possible that Gatali and Wallin (2015) may have recorded African Dusky Flycatcher in the place of Spotted Flycatcher as they could appear superficially similar. As it stands the records are possible but unusual and it is concerning that Spotted Flycatcher was not recorded at all.

Brown-backed Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas hartlaubi*

This species was observed several times by Gatali and Wallin (2015). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) consider this species to be an uncommon resident in Rwanda, absent from the semi-arid east of the country, and note that the White-browed Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys* is very common in Rwanda but occupies different habitats to *C. hartlaubi*. Sinclair and Ryan (2010) state that *C. hartlaubi* favours wetter areas than *C. leucophrys*.

It is possible that *C. hartlaubi* could be observed in ANP; it is usually unobtrusive except when calling and separating this species from *C. leucophrys* can be challenging. These records have potential to be validated by repeated observations or supplementary evidence.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

This species was recorded once by Gatali and Wallin (2015). Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that this species is an irregular visitor. This species is almost identical to the female or non-breeding male Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. The observer would have to be very experienced to separate these two species in the field with any certainty. This record should be doubted.

White-headed Black-chat *Myrmecocichla arnotti*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this bird 11 times. They state in their paper that they failed to observe Ruaha Chat *Myrmecocichla collaris*, which according to Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) should be common in ANP. The confusion is caused by a species split that Gatali and Wallin (2015) have failed to take into account, despite it appearing on the IOC World Bird List Version 3.1 (Gill and Donsker 2012). It is not mentioned in Stevenson and Fanshawe (2003). According to Sinclair and Ryan (2010), White-headed Black-chat *M. arnotti* is found in southern Africa. Ruaha Chat is found in Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda. The ranges of these two species do not overlap. Any record of White-headed Black-Chat *M. arnotti* in Gatali and Wallin (2015) should be considered as Ruaha Chat *M. collaris*.

Little Weaver *Ploceus luteolus*

The species was recorded at three locations by Gatali and Wallin (2015): the northernmost wetland edge, the others in more bushed land. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that no previous records of this species in Rwanda have been confirmed.

Little Weaver is known to be present in Uganda around Lake Victoria to the north of ANP, though it appears to be absent from most of western Tanzania, which is similar habitat to ANP. Craig (2017a) states that this species is more common in lower areas, i.e. below 1500 m, meaning that ANP would be towards the upper limit of its altitudinal range.

Slender-billed Weaver *Ploceus pelenzi* is known to be present in ANP (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011). This species is normally associated with water and adjoining vegetation, but is known to forage in bushes and visits gardens in urban areas (Craig 2017b).

Ploceus pelenzi was not observed by Gatali and Wallin (2015). The males of *P. luteolus* and *P. pelenzi* are practically identical. It therefore seems highly likely that Gatali and Wallin (2015) have confused these or other weaver species. Due to the similarity of several species of weavers that occur in the area, the records should be treated with caution.

Bronze Sunbird *Nectarina kilimensis*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) observed this species three times in ANP. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that it is absent from the semi-arid areas of ANP. This species is common elsewhere in Rwanda and it seems feasible that some individuals may be present on occasion in ANP as they do wander. Depending on the location in the park, these records are possible and further observations may validate this finding.

African Firefinch *Lagonostica rubricata*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) state that this bird was encountered 20 times throughout the park. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonostica senegala*, on the other hand, was only recorded on two occasions. These two species can be hard to separate.

Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that *L. rubricata* is uncommon in Rwanda. It is known from the subhumid and humid savanna areas and the highlands in the west, though it can be found in ANP. *Lagonostica senegala* is known to be common throughout Rwanda; it is easily observed in ANP and in a range of habitats including gardens (Vande weghe and Vande weghe 2011).

It seems unusual therefore that Gatali and Wallin (2015) only recorded the much more abundant species on two occasions and the less abundant species on 20. It seems highly likely therefore that Gatali and Wallin (2015) have misidentified some of these birds, with *L. senegala* being much more likely to be commonly found in ANP.

Black-and-white Mannikin *Lonchura bicolor*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species 23 times. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that this is a common species present throughout Rwanda with the exception of the semi-arid areas of east Rwanda, i.e. ANP.

Stevenson and Fanshawe (2002) note this species inhabits forest edge, lush thickets and cultivation. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) suggest that in the country it favours slightly damper conditions than the Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata*, a very common and widespread species in Rwanda.

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded what is known to be the more common species only five times and the species that should be absent 23 times. The Bronze Mannikin and Black-and-white Mannikin have more than a passing resemblance to each other; inexperienced observers could confuse these two species and the records are doubted.

Variable Indigobird *Vidua funerea*

Gatali and Wallin (2015) recorded this species on one occasion. Vande weghe and Vande weghe (2011) state that this bird was once on the Rwanda list, included by Schouteden in 1966 under the name *V. funerea centralis*,

which is now considered to be a race of the Village Indigobird *Vidua chalybeata*.

Vidua funerea is not currently known from Rwanda. Indigobirds are exceptionally difficult to separate in the field. This record is highly doubted.

Conclusion

The survey methodology employed by Gatali and Wallin (2015) appears to have been robust in theory and is well explained in their paper. Where there is an absence of information is on who actually conducted the bird surveys, whether they received prior training, and what experience they possessed. Judging from the number of errors that have been made, it is likely that some of the persons used to undertake surveys were inexperienced at bird identification.

We therefore make several assertions:

- (1) Considering that the number of new species to Rwanda identified is almost identical to species known to be present, we conclude that misidentification was a significant problem during surveys.
- (2) Only one field guide was used. It is advisable to have several resources available to assist with the identification of some species. Field guides can be supplemented with call recordings and other literature.
- (3) The data were not interrogated sufficiently against other sources (Britton 1980; Brown et al. 1982–2013; Carswell et al. 2005; Baker and Baker 2016; del Hoyo et al. 2017; and the referenced material therein). For rare unusual and first records, second opinions could have been sought from others in Rwanda and the East African Rarities Committee. Doing this should have eliminated or at least created healthy scepticism about some of the species recorded by the field observers.
- (4) Taxonomic treatment of species is inconsistent, despite the IOC World Bird List being used. Some splits included in the IOC list have been missed or their implications not taken into account. This demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the species being identified.
- (5) There appears to be a lack of supplementary information with regard to justifying the more unusual records, the exception being the Nubian Woodpecker.

Acknowledgements — We would like to thank Neil Baker and Don Turner for their support and advice. In addition, we thank the editorial staff of *Ostrich* for their contributions.

References

- Baker N, Baker L. 2016. Tanzania bird atlas. Available at <http://www.tanzaniabirds.net/> [accessed 13 June 2016].
- Britton PL (ed.). 1980. *Birds of East Africa*. Nairobi: East Africa Natural History Society.
- Brown LH, Urban EK, Newman K, Fry CH, Keith S, Safford R, Hawkins F (eds). 1982–2013. *The birds of Africa*, vols 1–8. London: Academic Press/Christopher Helm.
- Carswell M, Pomeroy D, Reynolds J, Tushabe H. 2005. *The bird atlas of Uganda*. Oxford: British Ornithologists' Club and British Ornithologists' Union.
- Craig A. 2017a. Little Weaver (*Ploceus luteolus*). In: del Hoyo J, Elliott A, Sargatal J, Christie DA, de Juana E (eds), *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Available at <http://www.hbw.com/node/61022> [accessed 30 January 2017].
- Craig A. 2017b. Slender-billed Weaver (*Ploceus pelzelni*). In: del Hoyo J, Elliott A, Sargatal J, Christie DA, de Juana E (eds), *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Available at <http://www.hbw.com/node/61048> [accessed 30 January 2017].
- del Hoyo J, Elliott A, Sargatal J, Christie DA, de Juana E (eds). 2017. *Handbook of the birds of the world alive*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Available at <http://www.hbw.com/node/61048> [accessed 30 January 2017].
- Gatali C, Wallin K. 2015. Bird diversity in the savannah habitats of Akagera National Park, Rwanda, in the post-war recovery period. *Ostrich* 83: 267–276.
- Gill F, Donsker D (eds). 2012. IOC World Bird List Version 3.1. Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/updates/archive-3-1-to-3-5/species-3-1-3-5/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
- Gill F, Donsker D (eds). 2016. IOC World Bird List Version 6.2. DOI: 10.14344/IOC.ML.6.2 [accessed 13 June 2016].
- Sinclair I, Ryan P. 2010. *Birds of Africa south of the Sahara* (2nd edn). Cape Town: Struik Nature.
- Stevenson T, Fanshawe J. 2003. *Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi*. London: Christopher Helm.
- Vande Weghe JP. 1992. New records for Uganda and Tanzania along the Rwandan and Burundian borders. *Scopus* 16: 59–60.
- Vande weghe JP, Vande weghe GR. 2011. *Birds in Rwanda: an atlas and handbook*. Kigali: Rwanda Development Board.