

The birds of Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho

G. KOPIJ

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A total of 117 bird species has been recorded in Sehlabathebe National Park, south-east Lesotho, consisting of 29 vagrants, 18 visitors and 70 breeding and probable breeding residents. For each species status was determined and abundance roughly estimated. Quantitative studies on breeding bird communities were carried out by means of the line transect method on four transects with the total length ca 30 km in the park and on two transects with the total length of ca 20 km outside the park. In the park, dominant species were represented by the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*, Ayres' Cisticola *Cisticola ayresii*, Yellow-rumped Widow *Euplectes capensis* and Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais*. Outside the park dominants were represented by Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis*, Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus*, Cape Canary *Serinus canicollis*, Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Stonechat, Cape Butning *Emberiza capensis* and Drakensberg Siskin *Pseudochloroptila symonsi*. Characteristic, high-altitude species in the park included Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit *Anthus hoeschi*, Orange-breasted Rockjumper *Chaetops auriantius*, Banded Martin *Riparia cincta* and Sentinel Rock Thrush *Monticola explorator*. Species such as the Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Sickle-winged Chat *Cercomela sinuata*, Mountain Chat *Oenanthe monticola*, Thick-billed Lark *Galerida magnirostris*, Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio*, Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, Cape Sparrow, Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus*, Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* and Golden Bishop *Euplectes afer* were absent or occurred in very low densities in the park, although they are widespread and common in the Maluti/Drakensberg grasslands (including areas neighbouring to the park). The lack of trees and shrubs for nesting, the lack of cultivated fields as feeding places and competition with related species both for food and nesting sites, may partly play a role in this regard.

Key words: Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho, birds, quantitative studies, conservation.

G. Kopij, Department of Biology, National University of Lesotho, P. O. Roma 180, Lesotho.

Introduction

Sehlabathebe National Park (SNP) was proclaimed on 27 February 1970 and to date it is the only national park in Lesotho (Pomela *et al.* 2000). Plant diversity of SNP has been studied by Kopij (2001b), and animal diversity by Lynch & Watson (1990) and Kopij (2001b). The first ornithological observations in SNP were made during the years 1975–1982 by J. Belcomb, C. Brown, R. Howard, M. Howard and L. Passineau. From 1987 to 1990, a total of 16 visits to record birds of SNP were conducted. Each visit lasted 1–4 days (11 visits in summer (November–February) and five in winter (April–September)). The following persons participated

in this project: L. P. Abbott, E. Bolding, J. Cambridge, K. E. Deas, S. Fairman, J. M. Gosnell, R. Guy, S. Haines, J. Jones, P. Osborne, D. P. Smits, B. Tigar, S. Van der Veur, J. P. Watson, H. Wilson, A. Wolfrohm and H. Wrayner. These observers used the standard Southern African Bird Atlas Project cards for reporting their records and also provided details of unusual records. To date, results of these observations are available mainly in the form of unpublished reports (Howard 1977; Howard & Howard 1977; Belcomb 1980). Although a booklet on birds of the park was compiled by Passineau (1977), this is only a popular account of more common species, together with a simple, not

annotated and not critically evaluated checklist of all species. The present study aims to determine and report on the status (based on my own and all previous records) and abundance (based on my own studies) of bird species in SNP and the surrounding area. To date, quantitative studies of bird communities in Lesotho have only been conducted in the lowlands: in urbanised areas of Maseru (Kopij 2000) and in rural areas and in farmlands in the Roma Valley (Kopij 2001a).

Study area

Located in the Qacha's Nek district of south-eastern Lesotho, SNP (7239 ha) was established in 1970. Ranging in elevation from 2200 m to 2600 m, it falls entirely within the *Themeda-Festuca* alpine grassland. SNP comprises short grasses (69 %), escarpments and colluvial lands (13 %), wetlands (11 %), water-courses (4 %) and roads and other man-modified areas (3 %). Except for a few small isolated willow *Salix subserrata* clumps, no other woody vegetation occurs in the park. Water in the form of streams, rivers and pools is abundant. Mean annual rainfall is 769 mm, with most rains (75 %) in November-March. Mean annual maximum and minimum temperatures are 19.6 °C and 2.2 °C respectively (Kopij 2001b). A map of SNP was published by Lynch & Watson (1990).

Methods

Quantitative studies

Quantitative studies were carried out from 12 to 15 January 2001. The American version of the line transect method (Bibby *et al.* 1992) was employed to assess density and dominance of breeding species. The observer walked slowly, counting his paces and stopping often to observe and record birds. Only the birds in front and on either side of the observer were recorded—those behind were not. Where the transect ended, birds beyond the end point were not counted. Distant birds only detectable using binocular were not searched for. A pair, not an individual, was the censused unit. A singing or otherwise observed male,

in a habitat suitable for breeding, was interpreted as one pair. If a male was not observed, a female, a group of fledglings or an occupied nest was also interpreted as one pair (Koskimies & Vaisanen 1991; Bibby *et al.* 1992).

Density estimates are based on morning counts only, as birds were markedly less active in the afternoon. For calculation of relative abundance (dominance), morning and afternoon counts were pooled. For comparison of the breeding bird communities in the park with that in man-modified neighbouring areas, two transects were also undertaken outside the park.

Morning counts covered four transects:

- along the road from the research station to the lodge (9 km); grassland with numerous stream valleys at the foot of Thaba Ntšo; surveyed from 6:00 to 11:00 on 12 January 2001;
- from the research station along the north-west border of the park through Koti-se-Seleho Tsoelikane to Tsoelikane Falls (7 km); mainly short grassland with a few stream valleys and sandstone formations; surveyed from 6:00 to 10:00 on 13 January 2001;
- along the Tsoelikane River from Letamong village to the waterfall (6 km); extensive marshland with fairly tall and dense grass and sedges; surveyed from 10:00 to 12:30 on 13 January 2001;
- from the research station through the north-western corner of the park, Herdboy and Central Valleys to the waterfall (9 km); grassland with sandstone formations and stream valleys; surveyed from 6:00 to 11:00 on 15 January.

Afternoon counts were conducted along three transects:

- from the lodge to the research station; short grass with numerous stream valleys, ca 0.5 km to 2 km south of the main road; surveyed from 12:00 to 16:00 on 12 January 2001;
- from the waterfall along Romoluma and Moseha to the research station; short grass with numerous sandstone formations; surveyed from 13:00 to 16:00 on 13 January 2001;
- from the waterfall to the lodge along Tsoelikane valley (marshland dominated by *Merxmuelleria* spp. with seven rock pools vegetated with *Typha capensis*, *Aponogeton ranunculiflorus* and other water plants); from the lodge to the research station through short grass with stream valleys south of the main road; surveyed from 12:00 to 16:00 on 15 January 2001.

Outside the park counts were conducted on two transects:

- along the road between the main gate to the park and the crossroad near the Roman Catholic church in Sehlabathebe (ca 10 km); pastures, two villages, arable fields of wheat, sorghum and peas; surveyed from 9:45 to 12:15 on

14 January 2001;

- along the Leqooa valley upstream from the bridge between Ha Mavuka and Ha Semenyane to the confluence of Leqooa River and Thamathu River near Ha Soloja; *Salix* trees grow along the river banks; the valley is partly cultivated (mainly with wheat) and marshland is utilised as pasture for cattle and horses; surveyed from 12:45 to 15:45 on 15 January 2001.

Dominant species are those represented by more than 5.0 %, and subdominant species by 2–4.9 % of all breeding pairs recorded.

Annotated checklist

The checklist is based on results of all unpublished records by Howard (1977), Howard & Howard (1977), Passineau (1977) and Balcomb (1980) and those of G. Kopij (this study)

The following criteria were used to determine the status and abundance of each species:

- Status: *vagrant*—single records or once in a five-year period; *visitor* – not resident, and non-breeding, but recorded regularly in each year, often resident in neighbouring areas; *resident* – direct breeding evidence (nest with eggs or chicks, egg shells); *probable resident* – indirect breeding evidence (occupied territory, simultaneously singing males in optimal habitats, breeding display etc.); *Palaearctic migrant* – breeds in the Palaearctic region during the northern summer, wintering in SNP during the austral summer; *intra-African migrant* – breeds in SNP, but winters in tropical Africa; *altitudinal migrant* – breeding in SNP during the austral summer, but wintering outside the park, at lower altitudes; *nomad* – appears erratically, at no particular season, sometimes in large numbers that may breed.
- Abundance: *very common*—more than 200 breeding pairs (b.p.) in the entire park; *common*: 70–200 b.p.; *fairly common* – 20–69 b.p.; *uncommon*: 6–19 b.p.; *rare* – <5 breeding pairs. Abundance has been roughly estimated through extrapolations from transect counts and from observations.

Results of quantitative studies

Among 1120 potential breeding pairs represented by 51 species recorded during 12 to 15 January 2001 in Sehlabathebe National Park, four species were classified as dominant: Stonechat, Ayres' Cisticola, Yellow-

Table 1

Relative abundance (dominance) of birds in Afro-alpine Grassland in Sehlabathebe National Park in January 2001. Dominant species are given in bold case. Data from all transects is pooled

Species	Pairs	Dominance (%)
Stonechat	127	11.3
Ayres' Cisticola	125	11.2
Yellow-rumped Widow	95	8.5
Wailing Cisticola	77	6.9
Drakensberg Siskin	54	4.8
Mountain Pipit	54	4.8
Long-tailed Widow	50	4.5
Levaillant's Cisticola	46	4.1
Orange-throated Longclaw	44	3.9
Common Quail	36	3.2
Black Swift	34	3.0
Cape Bunting	33	2.9
Sentinel Rock Thrush	32	2.9
Cape Wagtail	31	2.8
Cape Canary	29	2.6
Orange-breasted Rockjumper	26	2.3
Ground Woodpecker	24	2.1
Greater Striped Swallow	24	2.1
Quail Finch	22	2.0
Cape Weaver	21	1.9
Banded Martin	19	1.7
Malachite Sunbird	13	1.2
Jackal Buzzard	13	1.2
Cape Robin	9	0.8
White-breasted Swallow	8	0.7
Rock Pigeon	6	0.5
Red-collared Widow	5	0.4
Grey-wing Francolin	5	0.4
Horus Swift	5	0.4
Yellow-breasted Pipit	5	0.4
Rock Kestrel	5	0.4
Black Crow	5	0.4
Rock Martin	4	0.4
Black Duck	3	0.3
Hadeda Ibis	3	0.3
Yellow-billed Duck	3	0.3
Red-winged Starling	3	0.3
Cape Sparrow	3	0.3
Pied Starling	3	0.3
Common Waxbill	3	0.3
Cape Turtle Dove	2	0.2
Bearded Vulture	1	0.1
African Marsh Harrier	1	0.1
Black Harrier	1	0.1
Lanner Falcon	1	0.1
Pied Kingfisher	1	0.1
Cape Eagle Owl	1	0.1
Rock Pipit	1	0.1
Spotted Prinia	1	0.1
Grey-headed Sparrow	1	0.1
Yellow Canary	1	0.1
Mountain Chat	1	0.1
Total	1120	100

Table 2
Breeding bird community of Afro-alpine Grassland in Sehlabathebe National Park in January 2001.
Dominant species are given in bold case

Species	Morning transects						
	1	2	3	4	Pairs	P./10 km	Dom.(%)
Ayres' Cisticola	6	22	19	39	86	26.9	11.7
Stonechat	19	18	23	20	80	25.0	10.9
Long-tailed Widow	4	13	14	12	43	13.4	5.8
Yellow-rumped Widow	17	15	24	15	71	22.2	9.6
Wailing Cisticola	17	11	4	10	42	13.1	5.7
Levaillant's Cisticola	2	3	24	8	37	11.6	5.0
Drakensberg Siskin	13	7	2	8	30	9.4	4.1
Mountain Pipit	4	15	-	10	29	9.1	3.9
Orange-throated Longclaw	5	5	5	12	27	8.4	3.7
Common Quail	-	5	11	10	26	8.1	3.5
Black Swift	-	4	5	16	25	7.8	3.4
Cape Bunting	8	9	2	5	24	7.5	3.3
Cape Wagtail	3	5	12	1	21	6.6	2.9
Sentinel Rock Thrush	3	6	1	7	17	5.3	2.3
Banded Martin	1	4	10	2	17	5.3	2.3
Cape Weaver	7	8	1	1	17	5.3	2.3
Ground Woodpecker	4	5	2	4	15	4.7	2.0
Cape Canary	12	3	-	-	15	4.7	2.0
Greater Striped Swallow	3	2	3	3	11	3.4	1.5
Orange-breasted Rockjumper	2	1	2	6	11	3.4	1.5
Quail Finch	1	4	-	6	11	3.4	1.5
Jackal Buzzard	1	4	3	1	9	2.8	1.2
White-breasted Swallow	4	1	2	-	7	2.2	1.0
Cape Robin	3	2	-	-	5	1.6	0.7
Malachite Sunbird	3	1	-	1	5	1.6	0.7
Red-collared Widow	3	1	-	1	5	1.6	0.7
Grey-wing Francolin	1	-	-	3	4	1.3	0.5
White-rumped Swift	-	-	-	4	4	1.3	0.5
Yellow-breasted Pipit	1	1	1	1	4	1.3	0.5
Black Duck	-	-	2	1	3	0.9	0.4
Rock Pigeon	1	-	-	2	3	0.9	0.4
Rock Martin	1	1	1	-	3	0.9	0.4
Hadedda Ibis	-	1	1	-	2	0.6	0.3
Yellow-billed Duck	-	-	1	1	2	0.6	0.3
Rock Kestrel	-	-	1	1	2	0.6	0.3
Black Crow	1	-	-	1	2	0.6	0.3
Red-winged Starling	1	-	-	1	2	0.6	0.3
Cape Sparrow	1	1	-	-	2	0.6	0.3
Bearded Vulture	-	-	1	-	1	0.3	0.1
African Marsh Harrier	-	-	-	1	1	0.3	0.1
Black Harrier	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Lanner Falcon	-	-	-	1	1	0.3	0.1
Cape Turtle Dove	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Pied Kingfisher	-	-	1	-	1	0.3	0.1
Cape Eagle Owl	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Rock Pipit	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Spotted Prinia	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Pied Starling	-	1	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Common Waxbill	-	-	1	-	1	0.3	0.1
Grey-headed Sparrow	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Yellow Canary	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	0.1
Total				736			

rumped Widow and Wailing Cisticola (Table 1). Together they comprised 37.9 % of all breeding pairs recorded. Subdominants, represented by 15 species (Table 1), constituted another 48 %. Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit, Orange-breasted Rockjumper, Banded Martin and Sentinel Rock Thrush can be classified as characteristic species.

Six species (Ayres' Cisticola, Stonechat, Long-tailed Widow, Yellow-rumped Widow, Wailing Cisticola and Levaillant's Cisticola) exceeded the density of 10 pairs/100 ha, 23 species nested in a density ranging from 1 to 10 pairs/10 km. The remaining species nested in a density lower than 1 pair/10 km (Table 2).

Table 3
Breeding bird communities in farmland bordering Sehlabathebe National Park in January 2001.
Dominant species are given in bold case

Species	Transect 1		Transect 2	
	Pairs	Dom. (%)	Pairs	Dom. (%)
Cape Weaver	2	1.6	25	14.0
Cape Sparrow	10	7.9	13	7.3
Cape Canary	8	6.3	13	7.3
Common Quail	16	12.6	4	2.2
Stonechat	7	5.5	13	7.3
Cape Bunting	10	7.9	8	4.5
Drakensberg Siskin	7	5.5	9	5.1
Cape Wagtail	4	3.1	12	6.7
Mountain Pipit	12	9.4	1	0.6
Ayres' Cisticola	6	4.7	7	3.9
Yellow-rumped Widow	4	3.1	8	4.5
Common Waxbill	4	3.1	5	2.8
Long-tailed Widow	5	3.9	3	1.7
Banded Martin	-	-	8	4.5
Black-throated Martin	-	-	7	3.9
Red-collared Widow	2	1.6	4	2.2
Greater Striped Swallow	-	-	6	3.4
Wailing Cisticola	4	3.1	1	0.6
Sentinel Rock Thrush	3	2.4	1	0.6
Pied Starling	4	3.1	-	-
White-breasted Swallow	-	-	4	2.2
Malachite Sunbird	1	0.8	3	1.7
Sentinel Rock Thrush	3	2.4	1	0.6
Pin-tailed Whydah	2	1.6	1	0.6
Cape Robin	1	0.8	2	1.1
Rock Martin	-	-	3	1.7
Black Duck	-	-	2	1.1
Jackal Buzzard	1	0.8	1	0.6
Horus Swift	1	0.8	1	0.6
Rock Pigeon	-	-	2	1.1
Quail Finch	2	1.6	-	-
House Sparrow	2	1.6	-	-
Grey-headed Sparrow	2	1.6	-	-
Black Swift	-	-	2	1.1
Red Bishop	-	-	2	1.1
Black Crow	1	0.8	-	-
Haded a Ibis	1	0.8	-	-
Hamerkop	-	-	1	0.6
Rock Kestrel	-	-	1	0.6
Cape Turtle Dove	1	0.8	-	-
Ground Woodpecker	-	-	1	0.6
Thick-billed Lark	1	0.8	-	-
Mountain Chat	-	-	1	0.6
Red-winged Starling	-	-	1	0.6
Levaillant's Cisticola	-	-	1	0.6
Total	127	100.0	178	100.2

Table 4
Temporal distribution of birds in Sehlabathebe National Park

Species	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Dabchick												
Grey Heron												
Black-headed Heron												
Hamerkop												
Black Stork												
White Stork												
Sacred Ibis												
Bald Ibis												
Hadeda Ibis												
Spur-winged Goose												
Egyptian Goose												
Black Duck												
Yellow-billed Duck												
Secretarybird												
Cape Vulture												
Lanner Falcon												
Rock Kestrel												
Yellow-billed Kite												
Black Eagle												
Bearded Vulture												
Jackal Buzzard												
Steppe Buzzard												
African Marsh Harrier												
Black Harrier												
Gymnogene												
Grey-winged Francolin												
Quail												
Red-knobbed Coot												
Crowned Crane												
Wattled Crane												
Blue Crane												
Ethiopian Snipe												
Greenshank												
Wood Sandpiper												
Rock Pigeon												
Cape Turtle Dove												
Barn Owl												
Spotted Eagle Owl												
Black Swift												
White-rumped Swift												
Alpine Swift												
Giant Kingfisher												
Ground Woodpecker												

Table 4 (continued)

Species	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
European Swallow												
White-throated Swallow												
Greater Striped Swallow												
Rock Martin												
African Sand Martin												
Banded Martin												
Black Crow												
White-necked Raven												
Rock Jumper												
Cape Rock Thrush												
Sentinel Rock Thrush												
Mountain Chat												
Stonechat												
Cape Robin												
Ayres' Cisticola												
Wailing Cisticola												
Levaillant's Cisticola												
Spotted Prinia												
Spotted Flycatcher												
Cape Wagtail												
Mountain Pipit												
Yellow-breasted Pipit												
Orange-thr. Longclaw												
Red-winged Starling												
Pied Starling												
Malachite Sunbird												
House Sparrow												
Cape Sparrow												
Cape Weaver												
Red Bishop												
Cape Widow												
Red-collared Widow												
Long-tailed Widow												
Quail Finch												
Pin-tailed Whydah												
Drakensberg Siskin												
Cape Canary												
Yellow Canary												
Cape Bunting												

In areas bordering SNP, the dominant species were quite different. In farmland the group was composed of the Common Quail, Mountain Pipit, Cape Sparrow, Cape Bunting, Cape Canary, Stonechat and Drakensberg Siskin, while in Tsoelikane valley the dominants were the Cape Weaver, Cape Sparrow, Cape Canary, Stonechat, Cape Wagtail and Drakensberg Siskin (Table 3). Also, composition of the group of subdominant species outside the park (Table 3) differed markedly from that inside the park (Table 2).

Annotated checklist

Nomenclature, systematics and species numbers follow Maclean (1993).

6. *Podiceps cristatus* Great Crested Grebe
Vagrant. Recorded in January 1980 (J. Balcomb). This is the only Lesotho record of the species during the past 50 years.
8. *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Dabchick
Vagrant.
55. *Phalacrocorax carbo* White-breasted Cormorant
Vagrant. Recorded in January 1988 (S. Fairman).
62. *Ardea cinerea* Grey Heron
Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas. On 23 December 1976, one aberrant individual with red bill and legs was observed (R. Howard).
63. *Ardea melanocephala* Black-headed Heron
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.
71. *Bubulcus ibis* Cattle Egret
Vagrant.
76. *Nycticorax nycticorax* Black-crowned Night Heron
Vagrant.
81. *Scopus umbretta* Hamerkop
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.
83. *Ciconia ciconia* White Stork
Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Most birds forage in the Tsoelikane valley below the waterfall, e.g. from 12 to 15 January 2001, a flock of 35 birds were observed there, and the whole population in the park was estimated at 40–50 pairs.
84. *Ciconia nigra* Black Stork
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.
91. *Threskiornis aethiopicus* Sacred Ibis
Vagrant.
92. *Geronticus calvus* Bald Ibis
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.
94. *Bostrychia hagedash* Hadedda Ibis
Visitor. Breeding in neighbouring areas.
95. *Platalea alba* African Spoonbill
Vagrant.
102. *Alopochen aegyptiacus* Egyptian Goose
Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.
104. *Anas undulata* Yellow-billed Duck
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River; uncommon.
105. *Anas sparsa* African Black Duck
Resident on the Tsoelikane River; uncommon.
108. *Anas erythrorhyncha* Red-billed Teal
Vagrant. Recorded in January 1980 (J. Balcomb), 01 October 1989 (J. Tigar & P. Osborne).
116. *Plectropterus gambensis* Spur-winged Goose
Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.
118. *Sagittarius serpentarius* Secretarybird
Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.
119. *Gypaetus barbatus* Bearded Vulture

Resident at Thaba Ntšo, where one pair nests.

122. *Gyps coprotheres* Cape Vulture
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas. Until late 1980's there was a breeding colony of 100–200 individuals in SNP (Barnes 1998).
126. *Milvus migrans* Yellow-billed Kite
Vagrant. Recorded on 01 September 1985 (H. Wilson).
127. *Elanus caeruleus* Black-shouldered Kite
Vagrant. Recorded in February 1990 (R. Guy) and November 1990 (J. Jones).
131. *Aquila verreauxii* Black Eagle
Vagrant. Recorded in January 1977 (R. Howard). During the years 1986–89 a pair was recorded; probably bred at Thaba Ntšo (Osborne & Tigar 1990).
149. *Buteo buteo* Steppe Buzzard
Palearctic migrant; uncommon.
152. *Buteo rufofuscus* Jackal Buzzard
Uncommon resident.
162. *Melierax canorus* Pale Chanting Goshawk
Vagrant. Single birds were recorded in April 1976 and December 1979 (J. Belcomb).
165. *Circus ranivorus* African Marsh Harrier
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4). During the years 1975–80, only one record (28 October 1976; J. Balcomb). On 15 January 2001 an adult with two juveniles was observed 3–4 km south of the lodge (*pers. obs.*).
168. *Circus maurus* Black Harrier
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4). Single pairs probably nested, at least during 1978/79 (J. Balcomb), 1980/81 (C. Brown), 1989/90 (R. Guy) and 2000/01 breeding seasons (*pers. obs.*).
169. *Polyboroides typus* Gymnogone

Vagrant.

172. *Falco biarmicus* Lanner Falcon
Rare resident.
181. *Falco tinnunculus* Rock Kestrel
Uncommon resident.
190. *Francolinus africanus* Grey-wing Francolin
Fairly common resident in grassy areas.
200. *Coturnix coturnix* Common Quail
Common altitudinal migrant (Tables 4 & 5).

Table 5
Habitat selection by Common Quails
(number of breeding pairs)

Habitat	SNP	Neighbouring area
Grasses	14	5
Sedges	5	-
Grasses + sedges	4	-
Marsh	3	-
Wheat	-	3
Peas	-	2

203. *Numida meleagris* Helmeted Guineafowl
Vagrant.
207. *Bugeranus carunculatus* Wattled Crane
Probably 1–2 breeding pairs. A pair, 5 January 1977 (R. Howard). January, April, December 1976; March 1980 (J. Balcomb); 3–4 January 1976, December 1982 (D. Cochlan). No records since 1983. SNP is the only locality in Lesotho where the species has been recorded.
208. *Anthropoides paradiseus* Blue Crane
Probably 1–2 breeding pairs. A pair, 28 December 1976 (R. Howard). September, 1975, October, December 1976 (J. Belcomb), 3 January 1976 (D. Cochlan). Not recorded after 1976.

209. *Balearica regulorum* Crowned Crane
Vagrant. Probably single pairs bred irregularly in summer 1975/76 (J. Balcomb). SNP is the only locality in Lesotho where the species has been recorded.
211. *Crex crex* Corncrake
Vagrant. Recorded on 3 January 1976 (Bonde 1990).
228. *Fulica cristata* Red-knobbed Coot
Visitor.
231. *Neotis denhami* Stanley's Bustard
Vagrant. Recorded in February and March 1979 (J. Balcomb).
264. *Actitis hypoleucos* Common Sandpiper
Palearctic migrant (Table 4).
266. *Tringa glareola* Wood Sandpiper
Vagrant. Two birds were recorded on 6 January 1977.
269. *Tringa stagnatilis* Marsh Sandpiper
Vagrant. Recorded in November 1990 (S. Fairman, J. Cambridge).
270. *Tringa nebularia* Greenshank
Palearctic migrant (Table 4).
274. *Calidris minuta* Little Stint
Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Recorded on 8 January 1977.
284. *Philomachus pugnax* Ruff
Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Recorded on 29 December 1976 (D. Cochlan).
286. *Gallinago nigripennis* Ethiopian Snipe
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4). Recorded in March 1977, January, February, June 1980 (J. Balcomb), November 1990.
297. *Burhinus capensis* Spotted Dikkop
Vagrant. Recorded in 5 January 1977.
349. *Columba guinea* Rock Pigeon
Fairly common resident, nesting on sandstone cliffs.
354. *Streptopelia capicola* Cape Turtle Dove
Rare resident in larger willow clumps.
382. *Clamator jacobinus* Jacobin Cuckoo
Vagrant. Recorded in November 1978 (J. Balcomb).
392. *Tyto alba* Barn Owl
Visitor. Resident in Sehlabathebe village (Osborne & Tigar 1990).
400. *Bubo capensis* Cape Eagle Owl
Probable resident, 1–2 pairs on Thaba Ntšo.
401. *Bubo africanus* Spotted Eagle Owl
Probable resident, 1–2 pairs on Thaba Ntšo.
412. *Apus barbatus* Black Swift
Common intra-African migrant. Nesting colonies were localised mainly around Thaba Ntšo and on sandstone cliffs around the waterfall.
415. *Apus caffer* White-rumped Swift
Fairly common Intra-African migrant (Table 4).
416. *Apus horus* Horus Swift
Uncommon intra-African migrant (Table 4), nesting along sandstone cliffs.
418. *Apus melba* Alpine Swift
Visitor. Intra-African migrant to neighbouring areas (Table 4).
428. *Ceryle rudis* Pied Kingfisher
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River below the waterfall. Not recorded since 1976 (R. Howard).
429. *Megaceryle maxima* Giant Kingfisher
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River.
431. *Alcedo cristata* Malachite Kingfisher
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River.
480. *Geocolaptes olivaceus* Ground Woodpecker

- Common resident. Breeds in the banks of rivers and streams and in erosion gulleys.
500. *Mirafra curvirostris* Long-billed Lark
Probable resident; rare.
507. *Calandrella cinerea* Red-capped Lark
Probably rare nomadic.
512. *Galerida magnirostris* Thick-billed Lark
Rare resident.
518. *Hirundo rustica* European Swallow
Palearctic migrant (Table 4).
520. *Hirundo albigularis* White-throated Swallow
Intra-African migrant (Table 4); uncommon.
526. *Hirundo cucullata* Greater Striped Swallow
Intra-African migrant (Table 4). Present along sandstone cliffs and on Thaba Ntšo.
529. *Hirundo fuligula* Rock Martin
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); nesting on sandstone cliffs.
530. *Delichon urbica* House Martin
Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Recorded in February 1990 (R. Guy).
533. *Riparia paludicola* Brown-throated Martin
Fairly common resident, nesting mainly along Tsoelikane River.
534. *Riparia cincta* Banded Martin
Fairly common Intra-African migrant, nesting mainly along Tsoelikane River.
547. *Corvus capensis* Black Crow
Resident; 2–5 pairs on larger sandstone cliffs and at Thaba Ntšo.
548. *Corvus albus* Pied Crow
Resident; 1–2 pairs at Thaba Ntšo.
550. *Corvus albicollis* White-necked Raven
Probably resident. One probable breeding pair at Thaba Ntšo.
551. *Parus afer* Southern Grey Tit
Vagrant. Recorded on December 1988 (S. Fairman).
581. *Monticola rupestris* Cape Rock Thrush
Rare resident; nesting along sandstone cliffs.
582. *Monticola explorator* Sentinel Rock Thrush
Common resident in short grasses with rocky outcrops or along rocky cliffs.
586. *Oenanthe monticola* Mountain Chat
Probable rare resident.
589. *Cercomela familiaris* Familiar Chat
Probable rare resident.
591. *Cercomela sinuata* Sickle-winged Chat
Visitor. Breeding in neighbouring areas.
596. *Saxicola torquata* Stonechat
Most birds are altitudinal migrants, some are resident. Very common in grassland, marshes and along streams and valleys during the breeding season. Breeds mainly in December/January, e.g. on 12–15 January 2001, most pairs were seen with 2–3 juveniles.
601. *Cossypha caffra* Cape Robin
Fairly common resident in willow clumps.
612. *Chaetops aurantius* Orange-breasted Rockjumper
Fairly common resident; nesting along sandstone formations.
667. *Cisticola ayresii* Ayres' Cisticola
Very common altitudinal migrant; breeding mainly in short grass.
670. *Cisticola lais* Wailing Cisticola
Very common resident, mainly in shorter grasses on sloping hillsides.

677. *Cisticola tinniens* Levallant's Cisticola
Very common resident in marshes and longer grasses, especially along water courses.
686. *Prinia hypoxantha* Spotted Prinia
Rare resident on lower slopes of Thaba Ntšo.
654. *Muscicapa striata* Spotted Flycatcher
Palearctic migrant. Recorded on December 1977 and January 1980 (J. Belcomb).
698. *Sigelus silens* Fiscal Flycatcher
Vagrant.
713. *Motacilla capensis* Cape Wagtail
Common resident along water courses, at rock pools and dams.
701. *Anthus hoeschi* Mountain Pipit
Very common intra-African migrant, nesting mainly in short grass.
721. *Anthus crenatus* Rock Pipit
Probable resident on lower rocky slopes of Thaba Ntšo.
725. *Hemimacronyx chloris* Yellow-breasted Pipit
Uncommon altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in short grass.
727. *Macronyx capensis* Orange-throated Longclaw
Common resident in marshes and in grass, especially along streams and river valleys.
732. *Lanius collaris* Fiscal Shrike
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.
759. *Spreeo bicolor* Pied Starling
Uncommon resident on lower slopes of Thaba Ntšo.
769. *Onychognathus morio* Red-winged Starling
Altitudinal migrant (Table 4); nesting along sandstone cliffs; uncommon. December-April.
775. *Nectarinia famosa* Malachite Sunbird
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4), usually close to sandstone formations and Kniphofia and Aloe communities.
801. *Passer domesticus* House Sparrow
Visitor, Resident at Sehlabathebe village.
803. *Passer melanurus* Cape Sparrow
Uncommon resident. Nesting recorded in old Cape Weaver nests in willows.
804. *Passer diffusus* Grey-headed Sparrow
Rare resident recorded in willow clumps.
813. *Ploceus capensis* Cape Weaver
Common altitudinal migrant (Table 4). Nests were located exclusively in willows, both in SNP and in the neighbouring area. Outside the park, on the banks of the Tsoelikane River, most nests were located 1–2 m above the water level. The number of nests per group ranged from 3 to 20.
824. *Euplectes orix* Red Bishop
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare. Breeding was recorded in old Cape Weaver nests in willows on banks of the Tsoelikane River outside SNP. This nest site is unusual for this species.
826. *Euplectes afer* Golden Bishop
Probably altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare.
827. *Euplectes capensis* Yellow-rumped Widow
Very common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in marshes and in grass along water-courses and at dams.
831. *Euplectes ardens* Red-collared Widow
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding usually in marshes.
832. *Euplectes progne* Long-tailed Widow

Very common resident in marshes and in grass along water-courses and at dams.

846. *Estrilda astrild* Common Waxbill
Fairly common resident, mainly along the Tsoelikane River.

852. *Ortygospiza atricollis* Quail Finch
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in grass, usually in close proximity of pools and dams.

860. *Vidua macroura* Pin-tailed Whydah
Uncommon altitudinal migrant (Table 4).

872. *Serinus canicollis* Cape Canary
Common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in grassy areas.

875. *Pseudochloroptila symonsi*
Drakensberg Siskin
Very common resident; breeding in grassy areas and marshes. Feeds mainly on seeds of *Helichrysum* spp. and *Polygonum* spp. A nest with one egg (20.5 x 16.5 mm) was found on 13 January 2001, located in short grass mixed with numerous *Helichrysum* flowers.

878. *Serinus flaviventris* Yellow Canary
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare.

885. *Emberiza capensis* Cape Bunting
Very common resident, usually along sandstone formations.

886. *Emberiza tahapisi* Rock Bunting
Vagrant. Recorded on 1 September 1985 (H. Wilson), 13 March 1987 (C. Brown).

The following species need confirmation before their inclusion into the list: Little Swift *Apus affinis*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* White-winged Widow *Euplectes albonotatus* and Bully Canary *Serinus sulphuratus*. All these species were listed by Passineau (1977), but without corroborating evidence. They are regarded as very rare in Lesotho

highlands (Osborne & Tigar 1990, Bonde 1993) and can be confused with congeneric species. The records may be considered, therefore, to derive from misidentification.

Conclusions

To date 117 bird species have been recorded in the SNP, 29 of them are vagrants, 18 are visitors, and 70 are breeding or probable breeding residents.

Dominant species are represented by Stonechat, Ayres' Cisticola, Yellow-rumped Widow and Wailing Cisticola. There are 15 subdominant species. Characteristic species include Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit, Orange-breasted Rockjumper, Banded Martin and Sentinel Rock Thrush.

It is important to note the absence or very low densities of the following species in SNP, which are widespread and common in the Maloti/Drakensberg grasslands (including areas neighbouring to SNP): Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Sickle-winged Chat, Mountain Chat, Thick-billed Lark, Red-winged Starling, Alpine Swift, Cape Sparrow, Grey-headed Sparrow, Red Bishop and Golden Bishop (cf. Osborne & Tigar 1990, Little & Bainbridge 1992, Bonde 1993). The lack of trees and shrubs for nesting, the lack of cultivated fields as feeding places and competition with related species both for food and nesting sites, may partly play a role in this regard.

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