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The birds of Gongoni Forest Reserve, South Coast, Kenya

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Summary

Between November 2007 and February 2008, bird species composition, richness and abundance were assessed at Gongoni Forest Reserve (classified as a Key Biodiversity Area) using transect and timed-species counts. A total of 140 bird species in 51 families were recorded with species accumulation curves indicating that a few more species could be discovered with additional search efforts. Four Near Threatened species—Southern Banded Snake Eagle Circaetus fasciolatus, Sooty Falcon Falco concolor, Martial Eagle Polemaetus bellicocus and Fischer's Turaco Tauraco fischeri, 15 East Africa Coast biome species and 13 regionally threatened species were recorded. Owing to the presence of these species of conservation concern both globally and regionally, and past and ongoing threats, this site merits more attention than previously accorded.

Introduction

The loss of tropical forests in Kenya has been dramatic. Over the last couple of decades the country has experienced intense reduction of forest cover, and today only less than 2% of the total land in Kenya is covered by forests (UNEP 2001). This area is below the internationally recommended minimum forest cover of 10% (IUCN 1995). Burgess et al. (2003) estimated that the coastal forests in Kenya have decreased in area since the early 1990s to about 650 km² currently, owing largely to human activities. While it is clear that this loss of forest cover and related threats to forest biodiversity should be stemmed, most of these coastal forests remain unstudied biologically, making prioritisation and drawing conservation recommendations difficult. Basic biodiversity surveys are necessary to provide this essential baseline information that can inform conservation and management interventions.

The coastal forests of Kenya are classified under the Coastal Forests of Eastern Africa biodiversity hotspot (Conservation International 2008; CEPF 2003; Myers et al. 2000) and host at least 105 globally threatened species, of which 64 are in the Kwale Forests (CEPF 2003). Overall, of the forest dependent and nationally threatened species in Kenya's forests, about 50% of the plants, 60 % of the birds and 65% of the mammals are found in the coastal forests, which shows the importance of this region despite its relatively small area and its overall lack of forest cover (less than 0.1% of the national total area) (Wass 1995). Threats to the coastal forests include encroachment, logging, and replacement of indigenous vegetation, forest fires, firewood collection and charcoal burning (WWF-EARPO 2006).

Gongoni Forest Reserve is recognised as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) (Eken *et al.* 2004) in Kenya, but there is scarcity of biological information about its biota. The forest has received little scientific attention in the past since biological research in coastal forests in Kenya has been concentrated in the major coastal forests including Arabuko-Sokoke and Shimba Hills forests. However, Gongoni is known to harbour several endemic and near-endemic plants and animals (Waiyaki 1995, Burgess *et al.* 2003), making it important for conservation. Between November 2007 and February 2008 surveys of bird species abundance and composition were conducted in Gongoni Forest Reserve. This paper describes the avifauna of Gongoni with emphasis on the species composition and relative abundance of different species.

Methods

Study area

Gongoni Forest Reserve (04°23′S, 39°29′E) lies on the South Coast of Kenya in Msambweni District. The reserve is adjacent to Gazi Bay and situated on one side of the Mombasa-Lungalunga Highway (Fig. 1). It is a moist semi-deciduous forest rising to an altitude of 40 m and covering an area of 824 ha (Waiyaki 1995). On site observations revealed that the forest is composed of characteristic indigenous tree species including *Cynometra webberi, Melicia excelsia, Mannlikara zanzibarensis, Hymenia verrocosa* and *Jubanedia magnitipulata*. These species form a mosaic of habitats in Gongoni comprising of grasslands, deciduous woodlands and bushlands. The habitats are characterised by the presence of forest wetlands (Fig. 1), most of which are small seasonal swamps that are seasonally flooded depending on the intensity of rainfall. During this study, most of the forest swamps had dried up leaving muddy water beds with little water. The most important mammal species in the reserve is Buffalo *Syncerus caffer*.

The area surrounding the forest reserve is an agricultural zone inhabited by the Mijikenda people who practice subsistence agriculture, generally practicing smallholder crop farming with limited livestock rearing. Other livelihood activities include fisheries and tourism (GOK 2008). As a result of crop and livestock farming in the area, the surrounding farms are usually subjected to burning of vegetation that often strays into the forest.

Bird surveys

Ten line transects (Bibby *et al.* 1992, Pomeroy 1992) measuring approximately 1 km each, with an inter-transect distance of at least 500 m, were established in the forest for bird sampling (Fig. 1). Data were collected by walking slowly at a constant speed along transects in the mornings (between 08:00-11:00)

and evenings (between 16:00-18:00) when birds were active. All birds seen or heard up to 20 m on either sides of the transect lines were identified and their numbers counted. We used this cut-off point in order to minimise errors from inadequate bird identification, double counting and over-representation of conspicuous species. Two to three transects were surveyed on each day depending on the prevailing weather conditions. The transect counts were repeated four times along each transect over the entire study period, giving a total of 40 transect runs. Eight were found along three transects where waterbirds were counted.

In order to get a more complete species list, timed-species counts (TSC) (Bennun & Waiyaki 1993) were also conducted. A total of 27 TSCs were done during the study period throughout the entire reserve. One or two TSCs were conducted in the evenings (16:00-18:00) and in the mornings (08:00-11:00) by one or two observers. Each lasted 40 minutes and birds were recorded in 10-minute intervals, indicating the first time a bird species was seen or heard. Observers generally kept away from the transect lines in order to maximise the area surveyed.

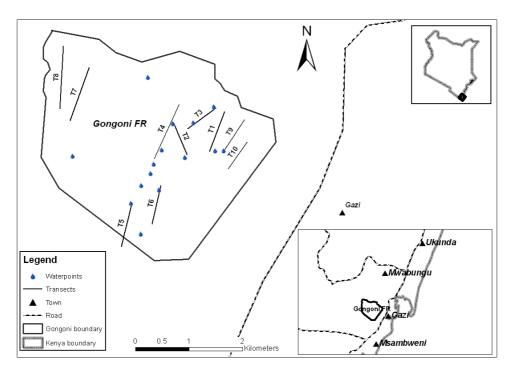


Figure 1. Map of study area showing the distribution of transects and other features in Gongoni Forest Reserve; top inset shows the position of Gongoni in Kenya, while bottom inset shows the towns neighbouring Gongoni in South Coast.

Data analysis

Records of new species in successive TSCs throughout the study period were used to draw a species accumulation curve. We used the TSC dataset only because we could easily construct a daily list based on it. We modelled the species accumulation curve by fitting an asymptotic model to our curve of observed data, using nonlinear regression procedures (Gaidet *et al.* 2005), adopting the exponential equation of the linear dependence model (Soberón & Llorente 1993).

All bird species recorded were categorised following Bennun *et al.* (1996) in terms of their known levels of forest dependence where: FF - forest specialists that are true forest birds characteristic of the interior of undisturbed forest; F - forest generalists that may occur in undisturbed forest but are regularly found in forest gaps, edges and strips; f - forest visitors that are often recorded in forests but are not dependent upon it; and s - birds associated with other habitats e.g. savannah/woodland and wetland areas. Relative abundance was calculated by dividing total number of each species recorded in the transect counts by the total birds recorded.

For TSCs species recorded in the first ten minutes received a score of 4; those recorded in the next ten minutes received a score of 3 and so on. TSC commonness index was calculated based on the assumption that common species are recorded earlier than the rare species during the survey. The index was calculated by averaging the mean scores for each count that varied between four (maximum value) and a minimum value of 1/n (where n is the number of repeated surveys) (Bibby *et al.* 1992). Statistical analyses were performed using STATISTICA 6.0 (StatSoft 2005).

Results

Bird species accumulation curve

A total of 140 species belonging to 51 families were recorded from the forest reserve (Appendix 1). These numbers included all species recorded during the field survey from the two methods, as well as species recorded during opportunistic observations. Transect counts recorded a total of 83 species, TSCs 84 species, while 32 species were opportunistic observations. Several species were recorded by both transect counts and TSCs, but 25 species were recorded by TSCs alone. The bird species accumulation curve (based on the TSC data) did not attain a plateau (Fig. 2). Our model seemed to approach asymptote at 149±15 species (Fig. 2). Thus, at 140, we probably recorded most of the species one would expect in Gongoni Forest Reserve except for a few.

Bird species composition and richness

Of the 140 species we recorded, 10 (or 7 %) were forest specialists (FF), 27 (19 %) forest generalists (F), 32 (23 %) forest visitors (f) and 71 (51 %) species associated with other habitats (e.g. savannah, woodland or wetlands). Four of

the species were listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red Data List (IUCN 2010): Southern Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus fasciolatus*, Fischer's Turaco *Tauraco fischeri*, Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* and Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicocus*. In addition, 13 were regionally threatened according to the East Africa Regional Red Data List (Bennun *et al.* 2000), 15 were East Africa Coast Biome species (Bennun & Njoroge 1999), 10 were Palaearctic migrants and 14 were Afrotropical migrants (Appendix 1).

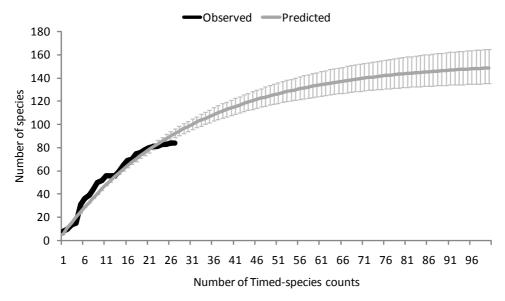


Figure 2. Species accumulation curve for Gongoni Forest Reserve calculated as the cumulative number of species against all the TSCs conducted, and the modelled species accumulation curve.

Bird species relative abundance and commonness

Commonness established by use of the TSC index revealed that the Collared Sunbird and Olive Sunbird were the most common species (Table 1). From the transects, 1720 individual birds were counted. Our data revealed that these two species were also the most abundant species in terms of numbers (Table 1). Considering the species of conservation interest, whilst the Southern-banded Snake Eagle and Malachite Kingfisher (both East African Coast Biome species) were among the least abundant, the Near-Threatened Fischer's Turaco was relatively common (Table 1).

Table 1. Common bird species in Gongoni Forest Reserve (based on TSC Index) with the mean number of individuals counted (per transect) and respective relative abundances (%).

Common name	Scientific name	TSC Index	Mean No. indls	Relative abundance
Collared Sunbird	Hedydipna collaris	4	40	9.2
Olive Sunbird	Cyanomitra olivacea	2.9	49	11.3
Common Bulbul	Pycnonotus barbatus	2.4	5	1.1
Black-bellied Starling	Lamprotornis corruscus	2.3	17	3.8
Crowned Hornbill	Tockus nasutus	2.2	12	2.9
Green Barbet	Stactolaema olivacea	2	36	8.3
Palm-nut Vulture	Gypohierax angolensis	2	10	2.3
African Palm Swift	Cypsiurus parvus	2	9	2.2
Silvery-cheeked Hornbill	Bycanistes brevis	2	20	4.7
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	Pogoniulus bilineatus	1.8	11	2.6
Tambourine Dove	Turtur tympanistria	1.6	5	1.2
White-throated Bee-eater	Dendrocygna viduata	1.6	34	7.9
Fischer's Turaco	Tauraco fischeri	1.3	9	2
Ring-necked Dove	Streptopelia capicola	1.3	1	0.2
Fischer's Greenbul	Phyllastrephus fischeri	1.2	31	7.1
Tropical Boubou	Laniarius aethiopicus	1.1	5	1.2
Black-and-white Mannikin	Spermestes bicolour	1	2	0.5
Eurasian Bee-eater	Merops apiaster	1	5	1.1
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	Turtur chalcospilos	0.9	1	0.1
White-browed Coucal	Centropus superciliosus	0.9	3	0.6

Discussion

Like most tropical coastal forests (Bennun & Njoroge 1999), our results show that Gongoni Forest Reserve supports a fairly rich avifauna. The species accumulation curve indicates that we recorded most of the species expected for the reserve, suggesting that extra sampling was likely to reveal only a few extra species. Since it is clear that neither method recorded all the species, use of multiple survey methods is encouraged in order to capture complete species lists.

The results indicate that some noisy species such as Green Barbet and Fischer's Greenbul recorded high overall species abundance. This according to Waiyaki (1995) could be true because some undergrowth species are extremely noisy and therefore are easily detected. There was a high proportion of forest generalist species (19 % of total species) in our checklist compared to forest specialists (7 %). This could be attributed either to the ability of forest generalists to persist and predominantly occupy modified forests (Bennun *et al.* 1996) or to the location of our sampling transects (Fig. 1) many of which were near the edges. However, we still believe we comprehensively surveyed the interior as well because the TSCs were conducted away from the transect

lines wherever possible to ensure we covered most of the Reserve.

Despite the clear importance of the site for bird (and biodiversity) conservation (e.g., from the presence of Near Threatened and regionally threatened bird species, as well as numerous biome characteristic species), human encroachment and other threats were common. For instance, there were many fresh tree stumps indicating ongoing logging activities, active saw-pits for timber processing, and forest fires were not uncommon. These activities could have explained the bird species composition we found, especially the low proportion of true forest specialists.

In conclusion, on the basis of the presence of species listed under the IUCN Red List and East Africa Regional Red List, Gongoni Forest Reserve deserves improved management. This could be both through enhancing the capacity of Kenya Forest Service (KFS) staff on the ground to help reduce the illegal activities, and building a positive perception of the local community towards forest conservation. In terms of research, more thorough avian scientific surveys including mistnetting may be necessary across different seasons, in order to get the entire checklist for Gongoni, and especially to ascertain the presence or absence of other bird species of conservation interest such as the Spotted Ground Thrush *Zoothera guttata*.

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Appendix 1. Taxonomic checklist of the birds recorded at Gongoni forest reserve showing forest dependence categories. The table shows all the bird species encountered in Gongoni Forest irrespective of the method of detection. Forest dependency status categories include: f- forest visitor species; F- forest generalist species; FF- forest specialist species; s- species associated with other habitats e.g. savannah, woodland and wetland. Other categories include NT- Near Threatened, RT – regionally threatended, AM- Afrotropical migrant, PM- Palaearctic migrant and MM-Malagasy migrant species with lowercase abbreviations representing migrants that occur alongside resident or non-migratory individuals (OS-c 2009). * EACB is the East Africa Coastal Biome.

Family	Common name	Scientific name	Status
Podicipedidae	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	S
Pelecanidae	Great White Pelican	Pelecanus onocrotalus	s, RT
Phalacrocoracidae	Reed Cormorant	Phalacrocorax africanus	S
Ardeidae	Dwarf Bittern	Ixobrychus sturmii	s, am
	Striated Heron	Butorides striatus	s, RT
	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	s, am
	Great White Egret	Ardea alba	s, RT
	Yellow-billed Egret	Egretta intermedia	s
Ciconiidae	Woolly-necked Stork	Ciconia episcopus	s, RT
Anatidae	White-backed Duck	Thalassornis leuconotus	s, RT
	White-faced Whistling Duck	Dendrocygna viduata	S
	African Pygmy Goose	Nettapus auritus	S
Accipitridae	Southern Banded Snake Eagle	Circaetus fasciolatus	F, NT*
	African Harrier Hawk	Polyboroides typus	f
	African Goshawk	Accipiter tachiro	F
	Shikra	Accipiter badius	f
	Great Sparrowhawk	Accipiter melanoleucus	F
	Little Sparrowhawk	Accipiter minullus	f
	Lizard Buzzard	Kaupifalco monogrammicus	f
	Ayre's Hawk Eagle	Hieraaetus ayresii	F, RT
	Eastern Chanting Goshawk	Melierax poliopterus	S
	Gabar Goshawk	Micronisus gabar	S
	Palm-nut Vulture	Gypohierax angolensis	S
	Crowned Eagle	Stephanoaetus coronatus	FF, RT
	African Fish Eagle	Haliaeetus vocifer	S
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter n. nisus	s, PM
	Tawny Eagle	Aquila rapax	S
	Wahlberg's Eagle	Aquila wahlbergi	s, am
	Martial Eagle	Polemaetus bellicocus	s, NT, RT
	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	s, am, pm
Falconidae	Sooty Falcon	Falco concolor	s, PM, N7
Phasianidae	Harlequin Quail	Coturnix delegorguei	s, am
Numinidae	Crested Guineafowl	Guttera pucherani	F
Nullillidae	Helmeted Guineafowl	Numida meleagris	S
Rallidae	Black Crake	Amaurornis flavirostra	S
Jacanidae	African Jacana	Actophilornis africanus	S
Charadriidae	Senegal Plover	Vanellus lugubris	S S
Scolopacidae	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	s s, PM
Columbidae	African Green Pigeon	Treron calvus	5, FIVI F
Coluitibluae	Tambourine Dove		F F
	Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	Turtur tympanistria Turtur chalcospilos	f

Family	Common name	Scientific name	Status
	Red-eyed Dove	Streptopelia semitorquata	f
	Ring-necked Dove	Streptopelia capicola	f
Psittacidae	Brown-headed Parrot	Poicephalus cryptoxanthus	F*
Musophagidae	Fischer's Turaco	Tauraco fischeri	F, NT*
Cuculidae	Klaas's Cuckoo	Chrysococcyx klaas	f
	Yellowbill	Ceuthmochares aereus	F, am
	White-browed Coucal	Centropus superciliosus	S
Apodidae	African Palm Swift	Cypsiurus parvus	S
	Little Swift	Apus a. affinis	S
	Mottled Spinetail	Telacanthura ussheri	F
Coliidae	Blue-naped Mousebird	Urocolius macrourus	S
	Speckled Mousebird	Colius striatus	s
Trogonidae	Narina Trogon	Apaloderma narina	F
Alcedinidae	Grey-headed Kingfisher	Halcyon leucocephala	f, am
	Mangrove Kingfisher	Halcyon senegaloides	S
	Striped Kingfisher	Halcyon chelicuti	s
	Malachite Kingfisher	Alcedo cristatagalerita	s*
Meropidae	Eurasian Bee-eater	Merops apiaster	f, PM
P	Northern Carmine Bee-eater	Merops nubicus	s, AM*
	White-throated Bee-eater	Merops albicollis	s, AM
	Little Bee-eater	Merops pusillus	S, 7
Coraciidae	Broad-billed Roller	Eurystomus glaucurus	f, am, mn
Cordonado	Lilac-breasted Roller	Coracias caudata	s, am
Phoeniculidae	Green Wood Hoopoe	Phoeniculus purpureus	S
r noornoanaao	Common Scmitarbill	Rhinopomastus cyanomelas	S
Bucerotidae	Crowned Hornbill	Tockus nasutus	f
Daoorollado	Trumpeter Hornbill	Bycanistes bucinator	F
	Silvery-cheeked Hornbill	Bycanistes brevis	F, am
	Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill	Bycanistes subcylindricus	F
Capitonidae	White-eared Barbet	Stactolaema leucotis	F
Capitoriidae	Red-fronted Tinkerbird	Pogoniulus pusillus	S
	Black-collared Barbet	Lybius torquatus	f
	Brown-breasted Barbet	Lybius melanopterus	f*
	Green Barbet	Stactolaema olivacea	FF, RT
	Green Tinkerbird	Pogoniulus simplex	
			FF, RT* F
Indiantoridas	Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	Pogoniulus bilineatus	
Indicatoridae	Lesser Honeyguide	Indicator minor	f
	Pallid Honeyguide	Indicator meliphilus	f
Disides	Scaly-throated Honeyguide	Indicator veriegatus	f F DT*
Picidae	Mombasa Woodpecker	Campethera mombassica	F, RT*
Eurylaimidae	African Broadbill	Smithornis capensis	FF
Alaudidae	Flappet Lark	Mirafra rufocinnamomea	S
Hirundinidae	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	s, PM
	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	s, PM
B. A	Wire-tailed Swallow	Hirundo smithii	S
Motacillidae	African Pied Wagtail	Motacilla aguimp vidua	S
	Yellow-throated Longclaw	Macronyx croceus	S
Pycnonotidae	Zanzibar Greenbul	Andropadus importunus	S
	Fischer's Greenbul	Phyllastrephus fischeri	FF, RT*
	Yellow-bellied Greenbul	Chlorocichla flaviventris	F

Family	Common name	Scientific name	Status
	Common Bulbul	Pycnonotus barbatus	f
	Eastern Nicator	Nicator gularis	F
Timaliidae	Rufous Chatterer	Turdoides rubiginosus	S
Turdidae	Red-tailed Ant Thrush	Neocossyphus rufus	FF*
	African Bare-eyed Thrush	Turdus tephronotus	S
Muscicapidae	Red-capped Robin Chat	Cossypha natalensis	F, am
	White-browed Robin Chat	Cossypha heuglini	f
	White-browed Scrub Robin	Cercotrichas leucophrys	S
	Bearded Scrub Robin	Cercotrichas quadrivirgata	f
	Collared Palm Thrush	Cichladusa arquata	S
	Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe isabellina	S, PM
	Ashy Flycatcher	Muscicapa caerulescens	F, am
	Pale Flycatcher	Bradornis pallidus	S
	Southern Black Flycatcher	Melaenornis pammelaina	s
	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata	s, PM
Cisticolidae	Tawny-flanked Prinia	Prinia subflava	f
	Grey-backed Camaroptera	Camaroptera brachyura	f
	Black-headed Apalis	Apalis melanocephala	FF
Monarchidae	Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher	Trochocercus cyanomelas bivittatus	FF*
	African Paradise Flycatcher	Terpsiphone viridis	f, am
Platysteiridae	Forest Batis	Batis mixta	FF*
atyotomado	Black-headed Batis	Batis minor	s
Malaconotidae	Black-crowned Tchagra	Tchagra senegalus	s
Malaconolidac	Grey-headed Bushshrike	Malaconotus blanchoti	S
	Tropical Boubou	Laniarius aethiopicus	f
	Black-backed Puffback	Dryoscopus cubla	F
	Slate-coloured Boubou	Laniarius funebris	S
Dicruridae	Common Drongo	Dicrurus adsimilis	S
Oriolidae	Black-headed Oriole	Oriolus larvatus rolleti	f
Offolidae	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus	f, PM
	African Golden Oriole	Oriolus auratus	f, AM
Corvidae	Pied Crow	Corvus albus	
Sturnidae			s F*
Nectariniidae	Black-bellied Starling	Lamprotornis corruscus	r F
Nectarinidae	Collared Sunbird	Hedydipna collaris	-
	Olive Sunbird	Cyanomitra olivacea	FF
	Amethyst Sunbird	Chalcomitra amethystina	f c*
	Mouse-coloured Sunbird	Cyanomitra veroxiii	f*
	Scarlet-chested Sunbird	Chalcomitra senegalensis	S
Passeridae	Grey-headed Sparrow	Passer griseus	S
Ploceidae	Village Weaver	Ploceus cucullatus	S
	Dark-backed Weaver	Ploceus bicolor	F
	Grosbeak Weaver	Amblyospiza albifrons	f
	Lesser Masked Weaver	Ploceus intermedius	S
	Zanzibar Red Bishop	Euplectes nigroventris	f, RT
Estrildidae	Peter's Twinspot	Hypargos niveoguttatus	F
	Black-and-white Mannikin	Spermestes bicolor	f
	Bronze Mannikin	Spermestes cucullatus	S
Viduidae	Pin-tailed Whydah	Vidua macroura	S
Fringillidae	Yellow-fronted Canary	Crithagra mozambica	S