

Kenya's fifth record of Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs* in Sibiloi National Park

Distribution of Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs* seems to follow the Sahel region, extending from Senegal/Mauritania to extreme northern Kenya, Somalia, as well as in the Arabian Desert in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. According to BirdLife (2016), this species is currently listed as Near Threatened on the basis that it is suspected to be undergoing a moderately rapid decline in population owing primarily to hunting pressure and habitat degradation. Zimmermann *et al* (1996) describes the species as rare in Kenya.

The first record of this species in Kenya was from East Turkana where a pair was collected in January 1932 (Zimmermann *et al.*, 1996). Fifty seven years later, in January 1989, a second record from East Turkana involved an individual photographed near Ileret (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996). Brian Finch has since photographed individuals in West Turkana, near Lokichogio in July 2001, and near Lokichogio in April 2003.



Arabian Bustard photographed near junction 11 in Sibiloi National Park, Marsabit County on 11 February 2015. This is Kenya's fifth (and southern-most) record of this species (Photo: Peter Mikula).

Our record and the fifth of this species in Kenya was on 11 February 2015 in Sibiloi National Park, Marsabit County, along the route from Koobi Fora Field School to Karsa gate, where we had two sightings which we believe were of different individuals, given the *c.* 30 km distance between the two birds and the species' tendency of preferring walking to flying. The first bird (photographed) was in an area dominated by *Acacia* sp. scrubby bushes with most of the ground bare, but with some short, heavily grazed grass tufts around the base of bushes. Close to this was an open, expansive area of bare ground. The second bird was observed close to Karsa gate where the area was more to less open with rocks scattered across the landscape. This last observation represents the southernmost documented record of this bustard in Kenya. Other bustards recorded in the park were Kori *Ardeotis kori* and Heuglin's *Neotis heuglinii*.

Although Arabian Bustard is described as rare in Kenya (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), we believe this could be attributed to the few birdwatchers and researchers who visit this vast northern area, and there could also be records that go unreported. From the five record dates (January–July, all from around Lake Turkana), it appears that this largely insectivorous species could be present here for most of the year. A thorough survey in different times of the year may help in understanding its distribution, seasonality and abundance, especially in the Sibiloi National Park.

During this northern Kenya trip, we made bird observations from Laisamis to South Horr, Mt. Kulal, Loiyagalani and Sibiloi National Park (between Karsa gate and Koobi Fora Field School). Some of the highlight species in each locality are reported in Wamiti *et al.* (2015).

References

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