

VU Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii*

2009 IUCN Red List Category (as evaluated by BirdLife International - the official Red List Authority for birds for IUCN): **Vulnerable**



Justification Although more common and widespread than previously thought, and not dependent solely on primary habitat, this species still has a small range, within much of which its woodland habitat is being altered and fragmented. Rapid population declines owing to habitat degradation and hybridisation with White-cheeked Turaco *T. leucotis* are continuing. The species is therefore classified as Vulnerable.

Family/Sub-family Musophagidae

Species name author (Salvadori, 1896)

Taxonomic source(s) Dowsett and Forbes-Watson (1993), Sibley and Monroe (1990, 1993)

Identification 40 cm. Long-tailed, arboreal bird. Green upperbody with dark back and tail. White, rounded, erectile crest. Bright scarlet wing-patches in flight. Bright red bill and eye-ring. **Similar spp.** White-cheeked Turaco *T. leucotis* has green, pointed crest. **Voice** Soft, hooting *droo droo* calls. Quieter *chruuk chruuk* notes.

Hints Fairly common in woodland and riverine forest along road from Kibre Mengist to Negele and in *Juniperus-Olea* forest north of Arero in southern Ethiopia. *T. ruspolii* and *T. leucotis* often occur close together but within different habitat-types, *leucotis* favouring *Podocarpus* forests and, more and more often, *Eucalyptus* and *Cupressus* plantations that have greatly expanded in the area in recent years. Outside the range of *ruspolii*, *leucotis* favours similar habitat to *ruspolii*.

Population estimate	Population trend	Range estimate (breeding/resident)	Country endemic?
2,500-9,999	decreasing	12,000 km ²	Yes

Range & population *Tauraco ruspolii* has a very restricted range in southern Ethiopia, around Arero, Bobela, Sokora, Negele and Wadera⁴. Fieldwork in 1995 found the species in all previously known localities and in some previously unreported sites¹. The northern part of the species's distribution encompasses the woodlands of Anferara-Wadera and adjacent Bore-Anferara⁴. It seems likely that these two areas, where it is not uncommon in suitable habitat⁴, hold the majority of the species's population. It is more common and widespread than was formerly believed⁶, but may never have occupied a much wider range than today¹, due to its restricted altitudinal distribution. In 1995, the population was estimated at c.10,000 individuals³. However, rapid changes to its habitat between 1995 and 2007 are likely to have caused a decline in the population of around 10-30%, and it is now expected to number less than 10,000 individuals¹¹.



Important Bird Areas Click [here](#) to view map showing IBAs where species is recorded and triggers any of the IBA criteria.

Ecology: This species is an arboreal frugivore and has been found in juniper forest, mixed broadleaved woodland, *Acacia* woodland along streams, and woodland edge. It is most common at mid-altitudes (c.1,500 m²) in habitats with relatively low humidity, and intermediate between lowland thorn-bush and montane forest^{1,2}. The diet includes fruits of *Ficus*, *Juniperus* and *Podocarpus*². Birds may undertake seasonal movements of a few kilometres¹ but rarely venture outside of forest habitat⁷. Recently, hybrids between *T. ruspolii* and White-cheeked Turaco *T. leucotis* have been observed, most commonly in edge habitats^{7,8}.

Threats Surveys in 1989 and 2003 revealed habitat loss and a decline in habitat quality at some sites⁸. Human pressure is probably to blame for the decline of the species around Arero, with fires being reported in neighbouring woodland areas in March 1994. Agricultural expansion was found to be the main cause of habitat degradation in the north during recent surveys, but overgrazing and uncontrolled bushfires were more important in the south⁸. Throughout, collection of firewood is degrading habitat⁸. However, the species does seem able to tolerate some human exploitation of its habitat⁶ which, being relatively semi-arid, is not as severely threatened by the expanding human population as most other Ethiopian forests¹. However, the area is wet enough to support coffee, which will likely result in increased settlement⁹. Many plantations of exotic tree species (*Eucalyptus* spp, *Cupressus* spp) have also been created recently^{8,9}. Not only do these seem to have failed in their aim of reducing pressure on native forests, but have - along with habitat degradation - facilitated a substantial expansion of the range of the forest-preferring *T. leucotis* into the range of the more woodland-favouring *T. ruspolii*⁸. Studies seem to indicate that *T. ruspolii* is not at risk from competition¹. However, recent observations of hybrids with *T. leucotis* have raised fears over the long term genetic integrity of *T. ruspolii*^{8,10}. In addition, the reluctance of turacos to fly across non-wooded habitat may make isolated populations unusually susceptible to local extinction⁷. Evidence has recently been found of attempts to illegally capture the species, perhaps indicating that this is an increasing threat, and access to areas within its range, although still difficult, has improved in recent years⁸. The capture of adult birds is likely to be for the cagebird trade and appears to be only a minor threat¹¹. The species's eggs may be taken for medicinal purposes, although this also likely to be a very minor threat¹¹.

Conservation measures underway CITES Appendix II. The woodlands of Anferara-Wadera and adjacent Bore-Anferara have been designated as National Forest Priority Areas⁴.

Conservation measures proposed Protect key sites, especially the area around Sele and Lela Lemu woodlands, but also juniper forest north of Arero³. Initiate a scheme for monitoring its distribution and population. Evaluate its habitat requirements in more detail. Investigate the importance of its seasonal use of woodlands. Carry out surveys in the wet season (April-May), when it is more evenly distributed across its range⁸. Investigate the possibilities for ecotourism in the area⁵. Investigate the extent of hybridisation between *T. ruspolii* and *T. leucotis*^{7,10}. Research use of plantations by *T. leucotis*, and assess whether natural tree plantations could be established that would not be favoured by this species, but would reduce human pressure on native woodlands⁸. Assess the level of hunting pressure for the illegal trade in adults and eggs⁸. Encourage reforestation with native tree species⁸.

References Collar and Stuart (1985). 1. Borghesio (1997a). 2. Borghesio (1997b). 3. Borghesio and Massa (2000). 4. EWNHS (1996). 5. A.

Shimelis *in litt.* (1998). **6.** Turner (1997). **7.** Lernoould and Seitre (2002). **8.** Borghesio *et al.* (2004). **9.** L. Borghesio *in litt.* (2005). **10.** Lernoould and Seitre (2004). **11.** L. Borghesio *in litt.* (2007).

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Recommended citation BirdLife International (2009) Species factsheet: *Tauraco ruspolii*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 1/3/2010

This information is based upon, and updates, the information published in BirdLife International (2000) *Threatened birds of the world*. Barcelona and Cambridge, UK: [Lynx Edicions](#) and BirdLife International, BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004 CD-ROM* and BirdLife International (2008) *Threatened birds of the world 2008 CD-ROM*. These sources provide the information for species accounts for the birds on the [IUCN Red List](#).

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