



## THE PROJECT

### Project name

**Saving the South Ethiopian Highlands for threatened endemics**

### Proposed flagship species

Prince Ruspoli's Turaco; Ethiopian Bush-crow; White-tailed Swallow; Sidamo Lark.

### What is the global and regional importance of the species/habitat concerned?

The South Ethiopian Highlands region covers approximately 37,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is one of Africa's 21 Endemic Bird Areas (EBA 114). The region is ranked as 'Critical' in terms of its overall biological importance and threat level, and has for many years been recognised as one of Africa's EBAs most urgently in need of conservation action.

Four globally threatened and restricted-range species occur in this southern extreme of the Ethiopian highlands, in the Oromiya National Regional State of southern Ethiopia. These endemics are found in an interconnecting variety of habitat types in two adjacent zones (Borena and Guji). The White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis* (VU) and Ethiopian Bush-crow *Zavattariornis stresemanni* (EN) live in thorn-bush savanna around the towns of Yabelo (capital of Borena Zone) and Mega, with the former also occurring on the Did Liben Plain, and it is found at Arero, within 50 km of the easternmost bush-crows. The Sidamo Lark *Heteromiraфра sidamoensis* (CR) is only known from the Did Liben grassland plains where it is close to extinction. Prince **Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii* (VU)** has a much wider and poorly understood range, although it is usually in podocarp and juniper forests, and *acacia* woodlands where fig trees are present. There is also a known population within a few km of the Did Liben Plain. In addition, the Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala* (VU) previously known only from a wing specimen has also been recently (April 2009) reported on the Nechisar grassland plains of this EBA. In biological terms, the bush-crow is by far the most extraordinary of the species in question, and indeed it is one of only four Ethiopian endemic species that occupies its own genus (and the only one of these that is threatened with extinction)—its closest relatives are the Asian ground-jays. The lark is also notably important, since all three members of its genus are highly threatened and clearly relict: molecular evidence suggests *Heteromiraфра* is basal to all larks, so it has a very particular importance in terms of biodiversity, being the oldest of all lark lineages.

The EBA consists of an intriguing mosaic of habitats: for the most part it is cattle-

grazed thorn-scrub woodland interspersed with crop-growing smallholdings near villages and along roads, but on the higher reaches there are remnant patches of juniper forest, at a very few sites there are remnant patches of open grassland, and scattered throughout are tracts of more savanna-like parkland dominated by red-soil columnar termitaria. The Horn of Africa presents many instances of highly restricted species, and explanations for these tiny ranges are often very hard to come by. They are believed to be "Pleistocene relicts", species whose ranges were once much wider but are now trapped in tiny areas of self-evidently suitable habitat, but precisely what it is that makes the habitat suitable remains an intriguing mystery. The bush-crow, for example, simply "stops", while apparently suitable habitat continues. The swallow does the same. The turaco occurs in patches of juniper, but it also turns up unexpectedly in patches of tall scrub.

The South Ethiopian highlands thus comprise one of the most unique and interesting ornithological regions in Ethiopia and restoration of habitats for the threatened endemics will also be positive for the livelihoods of the traditionally pastoral Boreana and Guji communities. Known for its rich natural attractions, southern Ethiopia offers captivating wildlife, scenic landscapes, great trekking possibilities and some of the continent's most diverse and fascinating peoples. The landscape is breathtakingly beautiful but quite remote and the people are poor. The only reason tourists now venture to the area is because of the attraction of the threatened endemics this project is trying to save. Avitourism has huge potential to boost revenue generation in this area but will need careful planning and attention.

**Why is this project identified as a priority for the organisation? What are the threats your project is addressing?**

This Endemic Bird Area and all of the restricted-range species that depend on it are subject to human activities modifying their habitat. All four of the proposed flagship species are Globally Threatened, and without intervention the Sidamo Lark is judged likely to become continental Africa's first avian extinction in the very near future. Threats to the South Ethiopian Highlands EBA include, for grasslands: conversion to dry-land arable agriculture, increased grazing pressure and scrub encroachment; and for forest: burning, commercial and domestic fuelwood cutting, and charcoal production. The only protected area within the area is the (2,540-km<sup>2</sup>) Yabelo Sanctuary, which supports populations of White-tailed Swallow and Ethiopian Bush-crow. However, it has never been gazetted, has no active management and appears to coincide almost exactly (the boundaries are undefined on the ground, so no-one knows for sure) with the area of a cattle-breed-improvement ranch. Habitat conservation interventions are urgently required to protect this EBA, and local communities and administrators need to be engaged and well informed about the value of the area for bird conservation. Local pastoralist communities recently (May 2009) consulted in a workshop at Negele concerning the Did Liben Plain indicated their enthusiastic support for grassland conservation measures.

The conservation biology of the restricted-range species living within the South Ethiopian EBA needs to be studied in detail, determining for the first time the optimal conditions for the survival of the individual species (without which no management prescriptions can be confidently drawn up), establishing baseline data for their monitoring and management, and providing a crucial opportunity to build the capacity of more Ethiopian nationals in undertaking bird research and conservation.

**Project objectives: Using the Bird Fair funds, what will be achieved, by when?**

**Project Goal: is to restore and protect critical habitat for the South Ethiopian Highlands endemic birds by working with local communities and other key stakeholders to protect habitat, species and local livelihoods within the EBA.**

Objectives
1.0 Within three years undertake direct conservation measures to protect and restore habitats of the South Ethiopian Highlands EBA and four threatened endemic species by (a) restoring grassland on the core site of Did Liben Plain, (b) strengthening protection and management in the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary, (c) enacting forest restoration at Mankubsa Forest Area
2.0 Prepare Species Action Plans for all four flagship species and secure funding to implement these plans.
3.0 Determine the ecological requirements of each species and clarify the distributions, populations and habitat requirements of (plus the actual and potential threats to) these endemics through targeted research.
4.0 Raise awareness in the Oromiya regional state and at the national level concerning the EBA and its endemics to generate interest in, and support for, environmental conservation, and raise the profile of threats to the EBA and its endemics and the actions required to address these threats both locally and nationally.
5.0 Over the time-frame of the project build the capacity of the BirdLife Partner in Ethiopia (EWNHS) and other Ethiopian nationals in biodiversity research and conservation through formal and experiential training.
6.0 Take steps to generate local incomes and awareness through ecotourism, and work with EWNHS and community and government stakeholders to secure further funding for increasing the scale of the proposed project activities where appropriate.
7.0

**Project activities: What activities will be undertaken by whom to deliver these results?**

Activities	By whom?
<b>1.0. Direct Conservation</b>	
1.1 Establish community-managed grassland enclosures in the Did Liben Plain (locality of Sidamo Lark and White-tailed Swallow) to promote natural grassland regeneration	EWNHS <sup>1</sup> , Intersectoral local committee (ILC) <sup>2</sup> , local community,
1.2 Clear encroaching scrub from the Did Liben Plain	ILC, local community, EWNHS
1.3 Work to prevent further encroachment by agricultural investors in the Did Liben Plain (including putting in place land agreements)	EWNHS, ILC
1.4 Initiate community-managed <i>Juniper</i> and <i>Podocarpus</i>	Local communities,

<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society – the BirdLife partner in Ethiopia

<sup>2</sup> During a consultative workshop held in May 2009, stakeholders established an inter-sectoral committee for the restoration of the Liben Plain and saving the Sidamo Lark

forest restoration efforts in the Mankubsa, Anferara and Arero forest areas (Prince Ruspoli's Turaco habitat, and later two hold Salvadori's Serin <i>Serinus xantholaema</i> )	Local administration, Forestry Department, EWNHS
1.5 Undertake measures to strengthen protection and management in the Yabelo Wildlife Sanctuary in consultation with stakeholders, and reach agreements for the long-term management of the entire Yabelo-Mega area for sustainable pastoralism and tree-cover maintenance.	Park Management, EWNHS, local administration
1.6 Initiate Site Support Groups at key project localities (at least Did Liben Plain and Yabelo-Mega area) to lead community-based site activities	EWNHS and BirdLife
<b>2.0. Species Action Plans</b>	
2.1. Undertake stakeholder workshops to develop Species Action Plans for the four endemic species	Concerned stakeholders in the Borena Zone, EWNHS, BirdLife Africa Species Working Group
2.2. Fundraise for the implementation of Species Action Plans for these four endemic species	EWNHS, BirdLife
<b>3.0 Research</b>	
3.1 Study in detail the ecological requirements and threats facing the following threatened endemic species: White-tailed Swallow, Ethiopian Bush-crow, Sidamo Lark and Prince Ruspoli's Turaco	Postgraduate students, BirdLife , EWNHS
3.2 Clarify the distributions and populations of the White-tailed Swallow and Prince Ruspoli's Turaco	BirdLife , EWNHS
3.3 Determine and explain Ethiopian Bush-crow's peculiar distribution and hence its population size	Postgraduate student, BirdLife
<b>4.0. Awareness Raising</b>	
4.1. Develop, maintain and strengthen Intersectoral Local Communities to advocate, support and mainstream conservation action for the key habitats of the EBA and the globally threatened endemic species	EWNHS, ILC – Negele; ILC - Yabelo
4.2 Raise awareness among local communities and policy makers at all levels (local, zonal, state, national and international) of the benefits of restoring key habitats for respective endemic species (grassland, forest etc.) and the biological importance of the areas they occupy	EWNHS, BirdLife
4.3. Develop and disseminate a wide variety of promotional materials (fact sheets, brochures, field signage, press releases etc) to publicise the project and its activities	EWNHS, BirdLife
4.4. Publish the results of research undertaken in peer-reviewed journals	EWNHS, BirdLife, Addis Ababa University
4.5. Make presentations on the project in appropriate national and international forums, particularly BirdLife Africa Partnership meetings and pan African conservation	EWNHS, BirdLife

conferences, to ensure replication throughout the continent	
<b>5.0. Capacity Development</b>	
5.1 Engage and co-supervise Ethiopian postgraduate students (3) in the research aspects of this project	EWNHS, BirdLife , Addis Ababa University
5.2 Engage graduate interns drawn from Ethiopia in the conservation aspects of this project	EWNHS
5.3. Train and develop capacity of EWNHS staff in fundraising, advocacy, research, monitoring, and site conservation through workshops, targeted on-the-job training and attendance at targeted conferences and events	EWNHS, BirdLife
5.4. Train local community groups (SSGs etc) in aspects of ecotourism e.g. bird guiding; hospitality etc	EWNHS
<b>6.0. Sustainability</b>	
6.1 Market the South Ethiopian Highlands as a rewarding birdwatching and tourist destination, including having a stand in British Bird Fair and doing talk presentations on the region and the endemics in the "Talks" Marquee.	EWNHS, Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism BirdLife
6.2. Identify and develop birding routes in the EBA (see also 5.4.)	EWNHS, BirdLife
6.3. Work with local stakeholders (SSGs, entrepreneurs, government etc) to maintain and derive benefits from ecotourism in the EBA (see also 5.4.)	EWNHS
6.4. Provide funding to initially hire and train a fundraiser at EWNHS to secure further funding for increasing the scale of the proposed project activities where appropriate and to improve the fundraising capacity of the Society	BirdLife, EWNHS
<b>Project outputs: what outputs will be produced as a result of the project and have the Bird Fair logo on?</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The community-managed natural grassland enclosures/reserves will be clearly marked with signboards acknowledging Bird Fair support, including logo</li> <li>2. Tree nurseries and areas demarcated for Juniper and Podocarpus forest restoration will also be clearly marked</li> <li>3. All scientific publications from the research activities will acknowledge the Bird Fair's support</li> <li>4. Species Action Plans will bear the Bird Fair logo and Bird Fair support would be acknowledged in implementation of the Action Plans</li> <li>5. All awareness materials used locally, nationally and internationally will contain the Bird Fair logo</li> <li>6. Tourism-marketing materials will bear the Bird Fair logo</li> <li>7. Birding routes will be clearly identified with appropriate signage bearing the Bird Fair logo</li> </ol>	

