

EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE FIELD REPORT

Project Title: Saving Cameroon's Rock Fowl

Principal Investigator: Dr Guillaume Dzikouk

Position/Affiliations: Programme Development Officer

Cameroon Biodiversity Conservation Society (BirdLife International Affiliate in Cameroon)

Research Site: Mbam-minkom/Kala Mountain Forest, Yaounde Area, Southern Cameroon, latitude 3° 52' North and longitude 11°20' - 11°27' East

Local Management Status of the Research Site(s) (e.g. National Park, RAMSAR Site, World Heritage Site, IBA etc.): IBA

Scientific names of primary species being studied: *Picathartes oreas*

Key Research Objectives:

- To estimate population status and determine the distribution of the species within the area
- To determine the specific habitat requirements and describe suitable habitats for the bird
- To identify and evaluate major threats to the species and its habitat
- To determine specific breeding requirements by monitoring clutch sizes, hatching rates, fledging rates, and details of the breeding behaviour
- To determine the home range of the bird using the radio tag method
- To formulate recommendations for conservation of the species through sustainable human activities, habitat management and land use planning.

Data Collection and Results

- a) Give a concise account of the data you have collected during the past field season.
- Stimulated awareness and located breeding sites of the Grey-necked Picathartes in the north-western part of the forest
 - Carried out vegetation survey on the western part of the Mbam-minkom mountain forest
 - Monitored the potential food supply of the bird
 - Laboratory work involving the sorting, identification and preservation of the specimens from food supply study.

b) What progress have you made towards achieving your original objectives?

Considerable progress to the estimate of 70% has so far been achieved.

c) Please provide a summary of your results (even if they are preliminary).

- So far, 16 breeding sites with 20 active nests have been identified, signifying an estimate of 40 mature individuals in the northwestern part of the forest. This indicates that the Mbam-minkom mountain forest is a stronghold for the globally threatened Grey-necked Picathartes.
- Previous reports claiming that the bird inhabits only primary forest had been disproved by observations in secondary forest. Results from this research confirm this assertion; however, recruitment does not seem to be probable in the degraded forest. It is thus important to determine the maximum threshold of disturbance for the species to be able to perpetuate within its habitat.
- Nest sites are generally covered by dense vegetation which does not only provide hideout for the very shy and elusive bird but equally provides excellent foraging grounds during breeding. This adjacent vegetation therefore needs to be kept intact.
- Apart from caves, the average angle of inclination of the overhanging rocks with the vertical for nest construction was estimated at 45°.
- The major threat to the species within this area remains forest clearance for traditional “slash and burn” agricultural practice and to a lesser extent, illegal timber extraction. At the moment we are looking at tackling this issue through the development of a wider management project that would address the needs of the forest adjacent populations.

Significance/Benefits of Research

a) What is/are the significance/benefits of your research at the following levels?

- Local (in the area of the research site)

At the local level, the presence of international teams enhances credibility within the local populations as they are quite aware of the international significance attached to the bird and are thus more committed to its conservation.

Presently, the local populations are well organised into a Community Development and Environmental Protection group known as CODEGEM, rallying their efforts to protect the site and share the benefit that could be derived from paid visitors for the interest of the entire community.

- National

At the national level, this research has witnessed the participation of a senior staff from the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) who recommended that the site be given a protected status as a Picathartes Sanctuary considering that the species is protected by the Government of Cameroon under class “A”, meaning that it is prohibited from any form of exploitation except with authorisation from the Government.

A national action plan for the species has been developed with contributions from these research results.

Findings from this research will equally contribute to the development of management plans for a wider management and conservation of the entire site in collaboration with the local communities.

The results have also been instrumental in updating the IBA and NBSAP data bases.

- International

At the international level, results from this research have contributed to the development of the international Species Action Plan for the Grey-necked Picathartes involving all the countries within its range of distribution.

b) How do your findings contribute to issues of sustainability?

The fact that the government is keen to support the creation of a sanctuary for the Picathartes is a direct impact of the results of this research project as this site appears to be a stronghold for the bird. This is confirmed by a report from the Ministry recommending the site as a sanctuary and another letter from the minister giving his accord to seek the necessary funding for the creation of the Picathartes sanctuary. This will ensure its long term conservation if the process goes through. A wider management project that will address the needs of the local populations and lead to the development of management plans incorporating aspects of the research findings for implementation by the local people who are now well organised and ready to carry on with the management of the site even after the project winds up.

Dissemination of Results

Have you provided details of results from your research to or within:

- Scientific papers (indicate status; e.g., peer reviewed or in progress/press)
 - Effect of vegetation structure and composition on choice of nest sites by the Grey-necked Picathartes. In progress.
 - Abundance and variation of the litter fauna and understorey insects as food supply to the Grey-necked Picathartes in the Mbam-minkom mountain forest, southern Cameroon. In progress.
- Management plans and reports (in progress or completed)

Findings from this research have been used in the development of both the International and National Species Action Plan for the globally threatened Grey-necked Picathartes and by the BirdLife International partners involving the countries within the range of distribution of the Grey-necked Picathartes. This research is of immense benefit to Taku Awa II who is currently making use of the data for his PhD studies at the University of Reading in the UK.

- Presentations (given or planned)

February 2004: Presentation of the research project to the staff of Earthwatch Institute (Europe) in the Oxford office - 20 participants

March 09, 2004: Presentation of the research project to the staff of HSBC in Birmingham, UK. 20 participants

November 28, 2003: Presentation of the research project to conference participants on the occasion of a workshop on the development of the Species Action Plan for the Grey-necked Picathartes. 30 participants

March 17, 2004: Presentation of the research project to the staff of Shell in London, UK. 50 participants

March 19, 2005: Presentation to the public on the occasion of the volunteer day at the Earthwatch office in Oxford. 30 participants

March 21, 2005: Presentation of the research project to the staff of Earthwatch Institute (Europe) in the Oxford office. 20 participants

- Popular articles or films (in progress or completed)

Dzikouk G. and Taku A. II (2003). New project for 2003 "Saving Cameroon's Rock Fowl" with the first team (1-15th May) comprising 6 African Fellows. *Earthwatch African Newsletter*, Issue 7, 2003.

Yaounde Massif Forest: Saving Cameroon's Rock fowl project kicks-up. *Cameroon BirdLine*

A 45-minute video work has been documented of the research team at work in the Mbam-minkom mountain forest in May 2004

- Books, chapters, illustrations
None

We would appreciate copies of any relevant materials you can make available to us.