The birds of Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho

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A total of 117 bird species has been recorded in Sehlabathebe National Park, south-east Lesotho, consisting of 29 vagrants, 18 visitors and 70 breeding and probable breeding residents. For each species status was determined and abundance roughly estimated. Quantitative studies on breeding bird communities were carried out by means of the line transect method on four transects with the total length ca 30 km in the park and on two transects with the total length of ca 20 km outside the park. In the park, dominant species were represented by the Stonechat Saxicola torquata, Ayres’ Cisticola Cisticola ayresii, Yellow-rumped Widow Euplectes capensis and Wailing Cisticola Cisticola lais. Outside the park dominants were represented by Cape Weaver Ploceus capensis, Cape Sparrow Passer melanurus, Cape Canary Serinus canicollis, Common Quail Coturnix coturnix, Stonechat, Cape Butning Emberiza capensis and Drakensberg Siskin Pseudochloroptila symonsi. Characteristic, high-altitude species in the park included Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit Anthus hoeschi, Orange-breasted Rockjumper Chaetops auriantius, Banded Martin Riparia cincta and Sentinel Rock Thrush Monticola explorator. Species such as the Laughing Dove Streptopelia senegalensis, Sickle-winged Chat Cercomela simiata, Mountain Chat Oenanthe monticola, Thick-billed Lark Gallerida magnostris, Red-winged Starling Onychognathus morio, Alpine Swift Apus melba, Cape Sparrow, Grey-headed Sparrow Passer diffusus, Red Bishop Euplectes orix and Golden Bishop Euplectes afer were absent or occurred in very low densities in the park, although they are widespread and common in the Maluti/Drakensberg grasslands (including areas neighbouring to the park). The lack of trees and shrubs for nesting, the lack of cultivated fields as feeding places and competition with related species both for food and nesting sites, may partly play a role in this regard.

Key words: Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho, birds, quantitative studies, conservation.

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Introduction

Sehlabathebe National Park (SNP) was proclaimed on 27 February 1970 and to date it is the only national park in Lesotho (Pomela et al. 2000). Plant diversity of SNP has been studied by Kopij (2001b), and animal diversity by Lynch & Watson (1990) and Kopij (2001b). The first ornithological observations in SNP were made during the years 1975–1982 by J. Belcomb, C. Brown, R. Howard, M. Howard and L. Passineau. From 1987 to 1990, a total of 16 visits to record birds of SNP were conducted. Each visit lasted 1–4 days (11 visits in summer (November-February) and five in winter (April-September)). The following persons participated in this project: L. P. Abbott, E. Bolding, J. Cambridge, K. E. Deas, S. Fairman, J. M. Gosnell, R. Guy, S. Haines, J. Jones, P. Osborne, D. P. Smits, B. Tigar, S. Van der Veur, J. P. Watson, H. Wilson, A. Wolfromm and H. Wrayner. These observers used the standard Southern African Bird Atlas Project cards for reporting their records and also provided details of unusual records. To date, results of these observations are available mainly in the form of unpublished reports (Howard 1977; Howard & Howard 1977; Belcomb 1980). Although a booklet on birds of the park was compiled by Passineau (1977), this is only a popular account of more common species, together with a simple, not
annotated and not critically evaluated checklist of all species. The present study aims to determine and report on the status (based on my own and all previous records) and abundance (based on my own studies) of bird species in SNP and the surrounding area. To date, quantitative studies of bird communities in Lesotho have only been conducted in the lowlands: in urbanised areas of Maseru (Kopij 2000) and in rural areas and in farmlands in the Roma Valley (Kopij 2001a).

Study area
Located in the Qacha’s Nek district of southeastern Lesotho, SNP (7239 ha) was established in 1970. Ranging in elevation from 2200 m to 2600 m, it falls entirely within the Themeda-Festuca alpine grassland. SNP comprises short grasses (69%), escarpments and colluvial lands (13%), wetlands (11%), water-courses (4%) and roads and other man-modified areas (3%). Except for a few small isolated willow Salix subserrata clumps, no other woody vegetation occurs in the park. Water in the form of streams, rivers and pools is abundant. Mean annual rainfall is 769 mm, with most rains (75%) in November-March. Mean annual maximum and minimum temperatures are 19.6 ºC and 2.2 ºC respectively (Kopij 2001b). A map of SNP was published by Lynch & Watson (1990).

Methods

Quantitative studies
Quantitative studies were carried out from 12 to 15 January 2001. The American version of the line transect method (Bibby et al. 1992) was employed to assess density and dominance of breeding species. The observer walked slowly, counting his paces and stopping often to observe and record birds. Only the birds in front and on either side of the observer were recorded—those behind were not. Where the transect ended, birds beyond the end point were not counted. Distant birds only detectable using binocular were not searched for. A pair, not an individual, was the censused unit. A singing or otherwise observed male, in a habitat suitable for breeding, was interpreted as one pair. If a male was not observed, a female, a group of fledglings or an occupied nest was also interpreted as one pair (Koskimies & Vaisanen 1991; Bibby et al. 1992).

Density estimates are based on morning counts only, as birds were markedly less active in the afternoon. For calculation of relative abundance (dominance), morning and afternoon counts were pooled. For comparison of the breeding bird communities in the park with that in man-modified neighbouring areas, two transects were also undertaken outside the park.

Morning counts covered four transects:
- along the road from the research station to the lodge (9 km); grassland with numerous stream valleys at the foot of Thaba Ntšo; surveyed from 6:00 to 11:00 on 12 January 2001;
- from the research station along the north-west border of the park through Koti-se-Seholo Tseolikane to Tseolikane Falls (7 km); mainly short grassland with a few stream valleys and sandstone formations; surveyed from 6:00 to 10:00 on 13 January 2001;
- along the Tseolikane River from Letamong village to the waterfall (6 km); extensive marshland with fairly tall and dense grass and sedges; surveyed from 10:00 to 12:30 on 13 January 2001;
- from the research station through the north-western corner of the park, Herdboy and Central Valleys to the waterfall (9 km); grassland with sandstone formations and stream valleys; surveyed from 6:00 to 11:00 on 15 January.

Afternoon counts were conducted along three transects:
- from the lodge to the research station; short grass with numerous stream valleys, ca 0.5 km to 2 km south of the main road; surveyed from 12:00 to 16:00 on 12 January 2001;
- from the waterfall along Romoluma and Moseha to the research station; short grass with numerous sandstone formations; surveyed from 13:00 to 16:00 on 13 January 2001;
- from the waterfall to the lodge along Tseolikane valley (marshland dominated by Merxmuelleria spp. with seven rock pools vegetated with Typha capensis, Aponogeton ranunculiflorus and other water plants); from the lodge to the research station through short grass with stream valleys south of the main road; surveyed from 12:00 to 16:00 on 15 January 2001.

Outside the park counts were conducted on two transects:
- along the road between the main gate to the park and the crossroad near the Roman Catholic church in Sehlabathebe (ca 10 km); pastures, two villages, arable fields of wheat, sorghum and peas; surveyed from 9:45 to 12:15 on
14 January 2001;
- along the Leqooa valley upstream from the bridge between Ha Mavuka and Ha Semenyane to the confluence of Leqooa River and Thamathu River near Ha Soloja; Salix trees grow along the river banks; the valley is partly cultivated (mainly with wheat) and marshland is utilised as pasture for cattle and horses; surveyed from 12:45 to 15:45 on 15 January 2001.

Dominant species are those represented by more than 5.0 %, and subdominant species by 2–4.9 % of all breeding pairs recorded.

Annotated checklist

The checklist is based on results of all unpublished records by Howard (1977), Howard & Howard (1977), Passineau (1977) and Balcomb (1980) and those of G. Kopij (this study)

The following criteria were used to determine the status and abundance of each species:

- **Status:** *vagrant*—single records or once in a five-year period; *visitor*—not resident, and non-breeding, but recorded regularly in each year, often resident in neighbouring areas; *resident*—direct breeding evidence (nest with eggs or chicks, egg shells); *probable resident*—indirect breeding evidence (occupied territory, simultaneously singing males in optimal habitats, breeding display etc.); *Palaearctic migrant*—breeds in the Palaearctic region during the northern summer, wintering in SNP during the austral summer; *intra-African migrant*—breeds in SNP, but winters in tropical Africa; *altitudinal migrant*—breeding in SNP during the austral summer, but wintering outside the park, at lower altitudes; *nomad*—appears erratically, at no particular season, sometimes in large numbers that may breed.

- **Abundance:** *very common*—more than 200 breeding pairs (b.p.) in the entire park; *common:* 70–200 b.p.; *fairy common:* 20–69 b.p.; uncommon: 6–19 b.p.; rare—<5 breeding pairs. Abundance has been roughly estimated through extrapolations from transect counts and from observations.

Results of quantitative studies

Among 1120 potential breeding pairs represented by 51 species recorded during 12 to 15 January 2001 in Sehlabathebe National Park, four species were classified as dominant: Stonechat, Ayres’ Cisticola, Yellow-
Table 2
Breeding bird community of Afro-alpine Grassland in Sehlabathebe National Park in January 2001.
Dominant species are given in bold case

| Species                  | Morning transects |          |          |          | Pairs | P/10 km | Dom.(%) |
|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|---------|---------|
|                          | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     |       |         |         |
| Ayres' Cisticola         | 6     | 22    | 19    | 39    | 86    | 26.9    | 11.7    |
| Long-tailed Widow        | 19    | 18    | 23    | 20    | 80    | 25.0    | 10.9    |
| Yellow-rumped Widow      | 17    | 15    | 24    | 15    | 71    | 22.2    | 9.6     |
| Wailing Cisticola        | 17    | 11    | 4     | 10    | 42    | 13.1    | 5.7     |
| Levallant's Cisticola    | 2     | 3     | 24    | 8     | 37    | 11.6    | 5.0     |
| Drakensberg Siskin       | 13    | 7     | 2     | 8     | 30    | 9.4     | 4.1     |
| Orange-throated Longclaw | 5     | 4     | 4     | 2     | 26    | 8.1     | 3.5     |
| Common Quail             | -     | 5     | 11    | 10    | 29    | 9.1     | 3.9     |
| Black Swift              | -     | 4     | 5     | 16    | 25    | 7.8     | 3.4     |
| Cape Bunting             | 8     | 9     | 2     | 5     | 24    | 7.5     | 3.3     |
| Cape Wagtail             | 3     | 5     | 12    | 1     | 21    | 6.6     | 2.9     |
| Sentinel Rock Thrush     | 3     | 6     | 1     | 7     | 17    | 5.3     | 2.3     |
| Banded Martin            | 1     | 4     | 10    | 2     | 17    | 5.3     | 2.3     |
| Cape Weaver              | 7     | 8     | 1     | 1     | 17    | 5.3     | 2.3     |
| Ground Woodpecker        | 4     | 5     | 2     | 4     | 15    | 4.7     | 2.0     |
| Cape Canary              | 12    | 3     | -     | -     | 15    | 4.7     | 2.0     |
| Greater Striped Swallow  | 3     | 2     | 3     | 3     | 11    | 3.4     | 1.5     |
| Orange-breasted Rockjumper | 2  | 1     | 2     | 6     | 11    | 3.4     | 1.5     |
| Quail Finch              | 1     | 4     | -     | 6     | 11    | 3.4     | 1.5     |
| Jackal Buzzard           | 1     | 4     | 3     | 1     | 9     | 2.8     | 1.2     |
| White-breasted Swallow   | 4     | 1     | 2     | -     | 7     | 2.2     | 1.0     |
| Cape Robin               | 3     | 2     | -     | -     | 5     | 1.6     | 0.7     |
| Malachite Sunbird        | 3     | 1     | -     | 1     | 5     | 1.6     | 0.7     |
| Red-collared Widow       | 3     | 1     | -     | 1     | 5     | 1.6     | 0.7     |
| Grey-wing Francolin      | 1     | -     | -     | 3     | 4     | 1.3     | 0.5     |
| White-rumped Swift       | -     | -     | -     | 4     | 4     | 1.3     | 0.5     |
| Yellow-breasted Pipit    | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 4     | 1.3     | 0.5     |
| Black Duck               | -     | -     | 2     | 1     | 3     | 0.9     | 0.4     |
| Rock Pigeon              | 1     | -     | -     | 2     | 3     | 0.9     | 0.4     |
| Rock Martin              | 1     | 1     | -     | 1     | 3     | 0.9     | 0.4     |
| Hadeda Ibis              | -     | 1     | -     | 1     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Yellow-billed Duck       | -     | -     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Rock Kestrel             | -     | -     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Black Crow               | 1     | -     | -     | 1     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Red-winged Starling      | 1     | -     | -     | 1     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Cape Sparrow             | 1     | 1     | -     | -     | 2     | 0.6     | 0.3     |
| Bearded Vulture          | -     | -     | 1     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| African Marsh Harrier     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Black Harrier            | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Lanner Falcon            | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Cape Turtle Dove         | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Pied Kingfisher          | -     | -     | 1     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Cape Eagle Owl           | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Rock Pipit               | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Spotted Prinia           | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Pied Starling            | -     | 1     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Common Waxbill           | -     | -     | 1     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Grey-headed Sparrow      | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Yellow Canary            | 1     | -     | -     | -     | 1     | 0.3     | 0.1     |
| Total                    |       |       |       |       | 736   |         |         |
rumped Widow and Wailing Cisticola (Table 1). Together they comprised 37.9% of all breeding pairs recorded. Subdominants, represented by 15 species (Table 1), constituted another 48%. Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit, Orange-breasted Rockjumper, Banded Martin and Sentinel Rock Thrush can be classified as characteristic species.

Six species (Ayres’ Cisticola, Stonechat, Long-tailed Widow, Yellow-rumped Widow, Wailing Cisticola and Levaillant’s Cisticola) exceeded the density of 10 pairs/100 ha, 23 species nested in a density ranging from 1 to 10 pairs/10 km. The remaining species nested in a density lower than 1 pair/10 km (Table 2).

Table 3
Breeding bird communities in farmland bordering Sehlabathebe National Park in January 2001.
Dominant species are given in bold case

| Species                     | Transect 1 | Transect 2 |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
|                             | Pairs | Dom. (%) | Pairs | Dom. (%) |
| Cape Weaver                 | 2     | 1.6      | 25    | 14.0     |
| Cape Sparrow                | 10    | 7.9      | 13    | 7.3      |
| Cape Canary                 | 8     | 6.3      | 13    | 7.3      |
| Common Quail                | 16    | 12.6     | 4     | 2.2      |
| Stonechat                   | 7     | 5.5      | 13    | 7.3      |
| Cape Bunting                | 10    | 7.9      | 8     | 4.5      |
| Drakensberg Siskin          | 7     | 5.5      | 9     | 5.1      |
| Cape Wagtail                | 4     | 3.1      | 12    | 6.7      |
| Mountain Pipit              | 12    | 9.4      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Ayres’ Cisticola            | 6     | 4.7      | 7     | 3.9      |
| Yellow-rumped Widow         | 4     | 3.1      | 8     | 4.5      |
| Common Waxbill              | 4     | 3.1      | 5     | 2.8      |
| Long-tailed Widow           | 5     | 3.9      | 3     | 1.7      |
| Banded Martin               | -     | -        | 8     | 4.5      |
| Black-throated Martin       | -     | -        | 7     | 3.9      |
| Red-collared Widow          | 2     | 1.6      | 4     | 2.2      |
| Greater Striped Swallow     | -     | -        | 6     | 3.4      |
| Wailing Cisticola           | 4     | 3.1      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Sentinel Rock Thrush        | 3     | 2.4      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Pied Starling               | 4     | 3.1      | -     | -        |
| White-breasted Swallow      | -     | -        | 4     | 2.2      |
| Malachite Sunbird           | 1     | 0.8      | 3     | 1.7      |
| Sentinel Rock Thrush        | 3     | 2.4      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Pin-tailed Whydah           | 2     | 1.6      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Cape Robin                  | 1     | 0.8      | 2     | 1.1      |
| Rock Martin                 | -     | -        | 3     | 1.7      |
| Black Duck                  | -     | -        | 2     | 1.1      |
| Jackal Buzzard              | 1     | 0.8      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Horus Swift                 | 1     | 0.8      | 1     | 0.6      |
| Rock Pigeon                 | -     | -        | 2     | 1.1      |
| Quail Finch                 | 2     | 1.6      | -     | -        |
| House Sparrow               | 2     | 1.6      | -     | -        |
| Grey-headed Sparrow         | 2     | 1.6      | -     | -        |
| Black Swift                 | -     | -        | 2     | 1.1      |
| Red Bishop                  | -     | -        | 2     | 1.1      |
| Black Crow                  | 1     | 0.8      | -     | -        |
| Hadeda Ibis                 | 1     | 0.8      | -     | -        |
| Hammerkop                   | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Rock Kestrel                | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Cape Turtle Dove            | 1     | 0.8      | -     | -        |
| Ground Woodpecker           | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Thick-billed Lark           | 1     | 0.8      | -     | -        |
| Mountain Chat               | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Red-winged Starling         | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Levaillant’s Cisticola      | -     | -        | 1     | 0.6      |
| Total                       | 127   | 100.0    | 178   | 100.2    |
### Table 4
Temporal distribution of birds in Sehlabathebe National Park

| Species                        | J | F | M | A | M | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dabchick                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Grey Heron                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black-headed Heron             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Hamerkop                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Stork                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| White Stork                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Sacred Ibis                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Bald Ibis                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Hadaed Ibis                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Spur-winged Goose              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Egyptian Goose                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Duck                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Yellow-billed Duck             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Secretarybird                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Vulture                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Lanner Falcon                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rock Kestrel                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Yellow-billed Kite             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Eagle                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Bearded Vulture                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Jackal Buzzard                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Steppe Buzzard                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| African Marsh Harrier          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Harrier                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Gymnogene                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Grey-winged Francolin          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Quail                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Red-knobbed Coot               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Crowned Crane                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Wattled Crane                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Blue Crane                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Ethiopian Snipe                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Greenshank                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Wood Sandpiper                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rock Pigeon                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Turtle Dove               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Barn Owl                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Spotted Eagle Owl              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Swift                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| White-rumped Swift             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Alpine Swift                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Giant Kingfisher               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Ground Woodpecker              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
### Table 4 (continued)

| Species                      | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| European Swallow             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| White-throated Swallow       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Greater Striped Swallow      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rock Martin                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| African Sand Martin          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Banded Martin                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Black Crow                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| White-necked Raven           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rock Jumper                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Rock Thrush             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Sentinel Rock Thrush         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mountain Chat                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Stonechat                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Robin                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Ayres’ Cisticola             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Wailing Cisticola            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Levaillant’s Cisticola       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Spotted Prinia               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Spotted Flycatcher           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Wagtail                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mountain Pipit               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Yellow-breasted Pipit        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Orange-thr. Longclaw         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Red-winged Starling          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Pied Starling                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Malachite Sunbird            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| House Sparrow                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Sparrow                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Weaver                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Red Bishop                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Widow                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Red-collared Widow           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Long-tailed Widow            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Quail Finch                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Pin-tailed Whydah            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Drakensberg Siskin           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Canary                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Yellow Canary                |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cape Bunting                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
In areas bordering SNP, the dominant species were quite different. In farmland the group was composed of the Common Quail, Mountain Pipit, Cape Sparrow, Cape Bunting, Cape Canary, Stonechat and Drakensberg Siskin, while in Tsoelikane valley the dominants were the Cape Weaver, Cape Sparrow, Cape Canary, Stonechat, Cape Wagtail and Drakensberg Siskin (Table 3). Also, composition of the group of subdominant species outside the park (Table 3) differed markedly from that inside the park (Table 2).

Annotated checklist

Nomenclature, systematics and species numbers follow Maclean (1993).

6. *Podiceps cristatus* Great Crested Grebe Vagrant. Recorded in January 1980 (J. Balcomb). This is the only Lesotho record of the species during the past 50 years.

8. *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Dabchick Vagrant.

55. *Phalacrocorax carbo* White-breasted Cormorant Vagrant. Recorded in January 1988 (S. Fairman).

62. *Ardea cinerea* Grey Heron Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas. On 23 December 1976, one aberrant individual with red bill and legs was observed (R. Howard).

63. *Ardea melanocephala* Black-headed Heron Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.

71. *Bubulcus ibis* Cattle Egret Vagrant.

76. *Nycticorax nycticorax* Black-crowned Night Heron Vagrant.

81. *Scopus umbretta* Hamerkop Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.

83. *Ciconia ciconia* White Stork Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Most birds forage in the Tsoelikane valley below the waterfall, e.g. from 12 to 15 January 2001, a flock of 35 birds were observed there, and the whole population in the park was estimated at 40–50 pairs.

84. *Ciconia nigra* Black Stork Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.

91. *Threskiornis aethiopicus* Sacred Ibis Vagrant.

92. *Geronticus calvus* Bald Ibis Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.

94. *Bostrychia hagedash* Hadeda Ibis Visitor. Breeding in neighbouring areas.

95. *Platelia alba* African Spoonbill Vagrant.

102. *Alopochen aegyptiacus* Egyptian Goose Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.

104. *Anas undulata* Yellow-billed Duck Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River; uncommon.

105. *Anas sparsa* African Black Duck Resident on the Tsoelikane River; uncommon.

108. *Anas erythrorhyncha* Red-billed Teal Vagrant. Recorded in January 1980 (J. Balcomb), 01 October 1989 (J. Tigar & P. Osborne).

116. *Plectropterus gambensis* Spur-winged Goose Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.

118. *Sagittarius serpentarius* Secretarybird Visitor. Probably resident in neighbouring areas.

119. *Gypaetus barbatus* Bearded Vulture
Resident at Thaba Ntšo, where one pair nests.

122. *Gyps coprotheres*  
Cape Vulture  
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas. Until late 1980’s there was a breeding colony of 100–200 individuals in SNP (Barnes 1998).

126. *Milvus migrans*  
Yellow-billed Kite  
Vagrant. Recorded on 01 September 1985 (H. Wilson).

127. *Elanus caeruleus*  
Black-shouldered Kite  
Vagrant. Recorded in February 1990 (R. Guy) and November 1990 (J. Jones).

131. *Aquila verreauxii*  
Black Eagle  
Vagrant. Recorded in January 1977 (R. Howard). During the years 1986–89 a pair was recorded; probably bred at Thaba Ntšo (Osborne & Tigar 1990).

149. *Buteo buteo*  
Steppe Buzzard  
Palearctic migrant; uncommon.

152. *Buteo rufofuscus*  
Jackal Buzzard  
Uncommon resident.

162. *Melierax canorus*  
Pale Chanting Goshawk  
Vagrant. Single birds were recorded in April 1976 and December 1979 (J. Belcomb).

165. *Circus ranivorus*  
African Marsh Harrier  
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4). During the years 1975–80, only one record (28 October 1976; J. Balcomb). On 15 January 2001 an adult with two juveniles was observed 3–4 km south of the lodge (*pers. obs.*).

168. *Polyboroides typus*  
Gymnogene  
Vagrant.

172. *Falco biarmicus*  
Lanner Falcon  
Rare resident.

181. *Falco tinnunculus*  
Rock Kestrel  
Uncommon resident.

190. *Francolinus africanus*  
Grey-wing Francolin  
Fairly common resident in grassy areas.

200. *Coturnix coturnix*  
Common Quail  
Common altitudinal migrant (Tables 4 & 5).

Table 5  
Habitat selection by Common Quails  
(number of breeding pairs)

| Habitat        | SNP | Neighbouring |
|----------------|-----|--------------|
| Grasses        | 14  | 5            |
| Sedges         | 5   | -            |
| Grasses + sedges | 4  | -            |
| Marsh          | 3   | -            |
| Wheat          | -   | 3            |
| Peas           | -   | 2            |

203. *Numida meleagris*  
Helmeted Guineafowl  
Vagrant.

207. *Bugeranus carunculatus*  
Wattled Crane  
Probable 1–2 breeding pairs. A pair, 5 January 1977 (R. Howard). January, April, December 1976; March 1980 (J. Balcomb); 3–4 January 1976, December 1982 (D. Cochlan). No records since 1983. SNP is the only locality in Lesotho where the species has been recorded.

208. *Anthropoides paradiseus*  
Blue Crane  
Probable 1–2 breeding pairs. A pair, 28 December 1976 (R. Howard). September, 1975, October, December 1976 (J. Balcomb), 3 January 1976 (D. Cochlan). Not recorded after 1976.
209. *Balearica regulorum*  
Crowned Crane  
Vagrant. Probably single pairs bred irregularly in summer 1975/76 (J. Balcomb). SNP is the only locality in Lesotho where the species has been recorded.

211. *Crex crex*  
Corncrake  
Vagrant. Recorded on 3 January 1976 (Bonde 1990).

228. *Fulica cristata*  
Red-knobbed Coot  
Visitor.

231. *Neotis denhami*  
Stanley’s Bustard  
Vagrant. Recorded in February and March 1979 (J. Balcomb).

264. *Actitis hypoleucos*  
Common Sandpiper  
Palearctic migrant (Table 4).

266. *Tringa glareola*  
Wood Sandpiper  
Vagrant. Two birds were recorded on 6 January 1977.

269. *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Marsh Sandpiper  
Vagrant. Recorded in November 1990 (S. Fairman, J. Cambridge).

349. *Columba guinea*  
Rock Pigeon  
Fairly common resident, nesting on sandstone cliffs.

354. *Streptopelia capicola*  
Cape Turtle Dove  
Rare resident in larger willow clumps.

382. *Clamator jacobinus*  
Jacobin Cuckoo  
Vagrant. Recorded in November 1978 (J. Balcomb).

392. *Tyto alba*  
Barn Owl  
Visitor. Resident in Sehlabathebe village (Osborne & Tigar 1990).

400. *Bubo capensis*  
Cape Eagle Owl  
Probable resident, 1–2 pairs on Thaba Ntšo.

401. *Bubo africanus*  
Spotted Eagle Owl  
Probable resident, 1–2 pairs on Thaba Ntšo.

412. *Apus barbatus*  
Black Swift  
Common intra-African migrant. Nesting colonies were localised mainly around Thaba Ntšo and on sandstone cliffs around the waterfall.

415. *Apus caffer*  
White-rumped Swift  
Fairly common Intra-African migrant (Table 4).

416. *Apus horus*  
Horus Swift  
Uncommon intra-African migrant (Table 4), nesting along sandstone cliffs.

418. *Apus melba*  
Alpine Swift  
Visitor. Intra-African migrant to neighbouring areas (Table 4).

428. *Ceryle rudis*  
Pied Kingfisher  
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River below the waterfall. Not recorded since 1976 (R. Howard).

429. *Megaceryle maxima*  
Giant Kingfisher  
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River.

431. *Alcedo cristata*  
Malachite Kingfisher  
Probable resident on the Tsoelikane River.
Common resident. Breeds in the banks of rivers and streams and in erosion gulleys.

500. *Mirafra curvirostris*  
Long-billed Lark  
Probable resident; rare.

507. *Calandrella cinerea*  
Red-capped Lark  
Probably rare nomadic.

512. *Galerida magnirostris*  
Thick-billed Lark  
Rare resident.

518. *Hirundo rustica*  
European Swallow  
Palearctic migrant (Table 4).

520. *Hirundo abigialis*  
White-throated Swallow  
Intra-African migrant (Table 4); uncommon.

526. *Hirundo cucullata*  
Greater Striped Swallow  
Intra-African migrant (Table 4). Present along sandstone cliffs and on Thaba Ntšo.

529. *Hirundo fuligula*  
Rock Martin  
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); nesting on sandstone cliffs.

530. *Delichon urbica*  
House Martin  
Palearctic migrant (Table 4). Recorded in February 1990 (R. Guy).

533. *Riparia paludicola*  
Brown-throated Martin  
Fairly common resident, nesting mainly along Tsoelikane River.

534. *Riparia cincta*  
Banded Martin  
Fairly common Intra-African migrant, nesting mainly along Tsoelikane River.

547. *Corvus capensis*  
Black Crow  
Resident; 2–5 pairs on larger sandstone cliffs and at Thaba Ntšo.

548. *Corvus albus*  
Pied Crow  
Resident; 1–2 pairs at Thaba Ntšo.

550. *Corvus albicollis*  
White-necked Raven  
Probably resident. One probable breeding pair at Thaba Ntšo.

551. *Parus afer*  
Southern Grey Tit  
Vagrant. Recorded on December 1988 (S. Fairman).

581. *Monticola rupestris*  
Cape Rock Thrush  
Rare resident; nesting along sandstone cliffs.

582. *Monticola explorator*  
Sentinel Rock Thrush  
Common resident in short grasses with rocky outcrops or along rocky cliffs.

586. *Oenanthe monticola*  
Mountain Chat  
Probable rare resident.

589. *Cercomela familiaris*  
Familiar Chat  
Probable rare resident.

591. *Cercomela sinuata*  
Sickle-winged Chat  
Visitor. Breeding in neighbouring areas.

596. *Saxicola torquata*  
Stonechat  
Most birds are altitudinal migrants, some are resident. Very common in grassland, marshes and along streams and valleys during the breeding season. Breeds mainly in December/January, e.g. on 12–15 January 2001, most pairs were seen with 2–3 juveniles.

601. *Cossypha caffra*  
Cape Robin  
Fairly common resident in willow clumps.

612. *Chaetops aurantius*  
Orange-breasted Rockjumper  
Fairly common resident; nesting along sandstone formations.

667. *Cisticola ayresii*  
Ayres’ Cisticola  
Very common altitudinal migrant; breeding mainly in short grass.

670. *Cisticola lais*  
Wailing Cisticola  
Very common resident, mainly in short-grasses on sloping hillsides.
677. *Cisticola tinniens*  
Levaillant’s Cisticola  
Very common resident in marshes and longer grasses, especially along water courses.

686. *Prinia hypoxantha*  
Spotted Prinia  
Rare resident on lower slopes of Thaba Ntšo.

654. *Muscicapa striata*  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Palearctic migrant. Recorded on December 1977 and January 1980 (J. Belcomb).

698. *Sigelus silens*  
Fiscal Flycatcher  
Vagrant.

713. *Motacilla capensis*  
Cape Wagtail  
Common resident along water courses, at rock pools and dams.

701. *Anthus hoeschi*  
Mountain Pipit  
Very common intra-African migrant, nesting mainly in short grass.

721. *Anthus crenatus*  
Rock Pipit  
Probable resident on lower rocky slopes of Thaba Ntšo.

725. *Hemimacronyx chloris*  
Yellow-breasted Pipit  
Uncommon altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in short grass.

727. *Macronyx capensis*  
Orange-throated Longclaw  
Common resident in marshes and in grass, especially along streams and river valleys.

732. *Lanius collaris*  
Fiscal Shrike  
Visitor. Resident in neighbouring areas.

759. *Spreo bicolor*  
Pied Starling  
Uncommon resident on lower slopes of Thaba Ntšo.

769. *Onychognathus morio*  
Red-winged Starling  
Altitudinal migrant (Table 4); nesting along sandstone cliffs; uncommon. December-April.

775. *Nectarinia famosa*  
Malachite Sunbird  
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4), usually close to sandstone formations and Kniphofia and Aloe communities.

801. *Passer domesticus*  
House Sparrow  
Visitor, Resident at Sehlabathebe village.

803. *Passer melanurus*  
Cape Sparrow  
Uncommon resident. Nesting recorded in old Cape Weaver nests in willows.

804. *Passer diffusus*  
Grey-headed Sparrow  
Rare resident recorded in willow clumps.

813. *Ploceus capensis*  
Cape Weaver  
Common altitudinal migrant (Table 4). Nests were located exclusively in willows, both in SNP and in the neighbouring area. Outside the park, on the banks of the Tsoelikane River, most nests were located 1–2 m above the water level. The number of nests per group ranged from 3 to 20.

824. *Euplectes orix*  
Red Bishop  
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare. Breeding was recorded in old Cape Weaver nests in willows on banks of the Tsoelikane River outside SNP. This nest site is unusual for this species.

826. *Euplectes afer*  
Golden Bishop  
Probably altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare.

827. *Euplectes capensis*  
Yellow-rumped Widow  
Very common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in marshes and in grass along water-courses and at dams.

831. *Euplectes ardens*  
Red-collared Widow  
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding usually in marshes.

832. *Euplectes progne*  
Long-tailed Widow
Very common resident in marshes and in grass along water-courses and at dams.

846. *Estrilda astrild* Common Waxbill
Fairly common resident, mainly along the Tsoelikane River.

852. *Ortygospiza atricollis* Quail Finch
Fairly common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in grass, usually in close proximity of pools and dams.

860. *Vidua macroura* Pin-tailed Whydah
Uncommon altitudinal migrant (Table 4).

872. *Serinus canicollis* Cape Canary
Common altitudinal migrant (Table 4); breeding in grassy areas.

875. *Pseudochloroptila symonsi* Drakensberg Siskin
Very common resident; breeding in grassy areas and marshes. Feeds mainly on seeds of *Helichrysum* spp. and *Polygonum* spp. A nest with one egg (20.5 x 16.5 mm) was found on 13 January 2001, located in short grass mixed with numerous *Helichrysum* flowers.

878. *Serinus flaviventris* Yellow Canary
Probable altitudinal migrant (Table 4); rare.

885. *Emberiza capensis* Cape Bunting
Very common resident, usually along sandstone formations.

886. *Emberiza tahapisi* Rock Bunting
Vagrant. Recorded on 1 September 1985 (H. Wilson), 13 March 1987 (C. Brown).

The following species need confirmation before their inclusion into the list: Little Swift *Apus affinis*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* White-winged Widow *Euplectes albonotatus* and Bully Canary *Serinus sulphuratus*. All these species were listed by Passineau (1977), but without corroborating evidence. They are regarded as very rare in Lesotho highlands (Osborne & Tigar 1990, Bonde 1993) and can be confused with congeneric species. The records may be considered, therefore, to derive from misidentification.

**Conclusions**

To date 117 bird species have been recorded in the SNP, 29 of them are vagrants, 18 are visitors, and 70 are breeding or probable breeding residents.

Dominant species are represented by Stonechat, Ayres’ Cisticola, Yellow-rumped Widow and Wailing Cisticola. There are 15 subdominant species. Characteristic species include Drakensberg Siskin, Mountain Pipit, Orange-breasted Rockjumper, Banded Martin and Sentinel Rock Thrush.

It is important to note the absence or very low densities of the following species in SNP, which are widespread and common in the Maloti/Drakensberg grasslands (including areas neighbouring to SNP): Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Sickle-winged Chat, Mountain Chat, Thick-billed Lark, Red-winged Starling, Alpine Swift, Cape Sparrow, Grey-headed Sparrow, Red Bishop and Golden Bishop (cf. Osborne & Tigar 1990, Little & Bainbridge 1992, Bonde 1993). The lack of trees and shrubs for nesting, the lack of cultivated fields as feeding places and competition with related species both for food and nesting sites, may partly play a role in this regard.

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