

## **Project Update: May 2023**

The months January to March are marked by Palearctic migration of huge birds (in species richness and abundance) between the breeding and wintering sites. Some species also perform intra-African migration. Migration patterns offer an excellent opportunity to view birds you may not otherwise get a chance to see.

The research team has performed a series of field expeditions of bird counting during the migration season. The research team visited all study sites including the eastern escarpment-Arberebue, and Ghindae town and its beautiful suburbs. The team investigated all possible bird microhabitats, and bird species were identified, and their relative abundance was estimated to compare similarities and/or differences between seasons and emphasise site importance and population trend.

During the second survey, a total 110 and 102 species of birds were identified and recorded in the upper highland plains and eastern escarpment respectively, many of which are confirmed as migratory and breeding. Ghindae is known to support the highest number of bird species - 62 of the total 79 species documented are exclusively found there. Levels of species richness, distribution and relative abundance vary between sampling units, relative to habitat type, quality and seasonality, from very common and widespread to rare and localised.

The expedition helped us to identify and map some more important habitats and bird sites, especially for waterbirds. Some potential threats to the birds and their habitat were also identified, crucial step for further investigation, conservation and monitoring activities. More data will be collected during the top migration and dry seasons to see the seasonal variation in species richness and relative abundance of birds, expecting more species turnover between the seasons.

### **Unexpected Results**

Perhaps the most unexpected result of the bird inventory in the second phase was the record of Senegal thick-knee and Sudan golden sparrow, unusually, in the central highlands. Historically recorded from the western lowlands, usually associated with water, and the northern arid and the semi-desert eastern coastal plains, usually below 400m.

The research team tried to reach the younger scholars and, as a result, two senior biology students (4<sup>th</sup> year) were incorporated in the team. As part of the research, the students were given a mini project to do research on seasonal variation in diversity and relative abundance of birds in irrigated farmlands. The students took part in the festival held between inter-collages and presented their findings as progress reports. As part of the show, the students displayed some mounted birds and demonstrated how binoculars are used in bird watching.



**Figure 1:** Breeding colony of Village Weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*) (Top). Cut throated finch (Bottom).





**Figure 2:** Students demonstrating binoculars (Left) and displaying mounted birds (Right).



**Figure 3:** Flocks of Mixed Bird Species.