

Ethiopian surveys find high densities of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco but highlight threats

Recent surveys of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii* suggest that rates of habitat change have been very fast in the northern part of the species's range, where large areas have been converted to agriculture and plantations of exotic trees. The results of this survey will be of immediate use for conservation, as the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society [EWNHS, BirdLife in Ethiopia], prepares to develop a Conservation Action Plan for Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, said Mengistu Wondafrash, Executive Director of EWNHS. The Species Action Plan work will be made possible through recently secured financial support from the 2010 British Birdwatching Fair. Prince Ruspoli's Turaco (Vulnerable), is a macaw-sized bird with scarlet and navy-blue wings, long tail and green-and-white head. It was first discovered among the personal effects of Prince Ruspoli after he was crushed to death by an elephant in 1893. As the unfortunate nobleman had not had time to label the specimen, its origins remained a mystery for half a century before the species was seen in the wild by an English naturalist in southern Ethiopia. In 1995, its population was estimated at 10,000 individuals, but alarming rates of habitat destruction in the region were feared to have had negative effects on this bird, that lives along forest edges and in woodlands with scattered *Podocarpus* and fig trees. Fortunately, in the central part of Ruspoli's Turaco's range, the woodlands bordering Sede and Lela Lemu forests are still largely intact, and support high densities of the species. The forests themselves are inhabited by a rich avifauna that also includes the White-cheeked Turaco *Tauraco leucotis*. This area is clearly a key site for the conservation of the species, as it hosts the most important surviving population. However, the survey also found that rates of illegal logging and agricultural expansions are increasing in the area, and rates of habitat destruction are bound to increase as the road system will soon be upgraded to support the expansion of the mining industry, that is already flourishing in the area. Urgent actions are now needed to improve the conservation of Sede and Lela Lemu forests and of the woodland belt that surrounds them. The surveys were organised by Addis Ababa University and funded by a group of conservation organisations led by CEPA (Conservation des Espèces et des Populations Animales, France) and including Zoologische Gesellschaft für Arten- und Populationsschutz (ZGAP, Germany), Chester Zoo (UK), the International Turaco Society and the Avicultural Society (UK), Zlin Zoo (Czech Republic). This post was written by Alazar Daka, Luca Borghesio, Jean-Marc Lernoould and Afework Bekele.