

REPORT ON ANGOLAN BIRD CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Achievements of 2010 and plans for 2011

By Michael Mills, 5 November 2010

Bird conservation and research activities in Angola progressed well during 2010, with two months spent in the field in Angola during the period June-October. Below is a summary of activities and achievements for the year, and main planned activities for 2011. Many thanks to Tasso Leventis of the A. P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, The Rufford Small Grants Foundation and the Conservation Leadership Programme for their support during the past year. I look forward to continuing my work with you, and aligning my activities even more closely with the BirdLife network by working closely with BirdLife South Africa.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2010

Mount Moco project (see www.mountmoco.org for more details)

We spent a very successful week at Mt Moco in July, with 26 people joining us here for field work. Work conducted included starting a nursery with the help of Adam Harrower and Ernst van Jaarsveld (approximately 150 seedlings were planted and several seed trays of seeds; most plants were thriving 2-3 weeks later), a meeting with Nádia Marques from Ecovisão Angola to strengthen collaboration (by Martim Melo), an art competition at the local primary school, extensive collections of plants made by three botanists (Francisco (Maiato) Gonçalves, Adam Harrower and Ernst van Jaarsveld), small mammal surveys in forest and grassland (by Alta de Vos, Esme Beamish and Bruce Paxton, supported by Sarien and Glen Lategan), a preliminary list made of butterflies at Mt Moco by Steve Braine, more genetic samples collected of Afromontane birds (by Martim Melo, assisted by Ursula Franke and Mark Boorman), film shot by Alexandre Vaz for the production of a small documentary on the project, finding of the first nest (with eggs) of Margaret's Batis, further resource use surveys by Aimy Cáceres (assisted by Feliciano Tchalo and Francisco (Maiato) Gonçalves), and further training of Jose Dala in ornithological skills. Michael Rogerson of CGG Veritas in Luanda joined us and very kindly supplied transport to and from Luanda for some of the team members. Beat Weber from Development Workshop in Huambo also visited our project. The team visited the summit of Mt Moco.

A second follow-up visit was made in August 2010 by Michael Mills and Alexandre Vaz, together with two teachers from the Luanda International School, Juliet Mills and Tim Seccombe. Subsequent to this Mt Moco has

also been visited by Juares Bongo (Ecovisão Angola) in early September 2010, and by the Luanda International School in late September 2010.

To date the project we are running at Mount Moco has grown more rapidly than anticipated. The core activities (working with the community to reduce resource use and to plant trees) are proceeding at a satisfactory pace. At this stage it looks like the project stands some chance of success, although, as I'm sure you'll appreciate, working with communities is sometimes tricky. These are some of the achievements in more detail.

1. Fuel efficient stoves demonstrated to the community of Kanjonde and three stoves (two Vesto fuel efficient stoves and one solar oven) left with the community (July 2010). A follow up visit in August 2010 showed that the Vesto stoves were greatly appreciated by the community and worked very efficiently, although a visit by the Luanda International School in September 2010 indicated that further training in use of stoves was needed. Plans are under way to purchase and transport Vesto stoves for every household (n = 70) in the community, together with partners in Angola (Michael Rogerson of CGG Veritas and Juliet Mills of the Luanda International School).
2. A nursery has been established at Kanjonde village, employing four young men in the village on a part-time basis. Currently we have approximately 150 seedlings and several seed trays of seeds in the nursery (July 2010). This was done with the help of botanical horticulturalists Adam Harrower and Ernst van Jaarsveld of the South African National Biodiversity Institute. A follow-up visit in August 2010 showed that most of the seedlings were doing well, and some seeds had already germinated. Juares Bongo visited the site in early September 2010, and Juliet Mills towards the end of September 2010: photographs show that most plants are doing well. The first seedlings should be ready to plant towards the end of next year (2011), before the onset of the rains.
3. Extensive botanical collections made at Mount Moco by Ernst van Jaarsveld and Adam Harrower from SANBI and Francisco (Maiato) Gonçalves from ISCED (July 2010). Plant specimens have been transported to South Africa, where most specimens still await identification. It will be some time before a final botanical report and species list is available. This will be used to motivate for the area to be formally protected as a national park.
4. An environmental art competition was held at the local primary school (July 2010), to raise environmental awareness among scholars. Winners' art work has been added to the MountMoco.org website.
5. Small mammal surveys were made in forest and grassland at Mount Moco (July 2010). I still await the report from Alta de Vos and her co-workers, which will hopefully be available early next year. This will be used to motivate for the area to be formally protected as a national park.

6. Butterfly expert Steve Braine visited Mount Moco with our July 2010 expedition and is in the process of compiling a preliminary species list of butterflies, hopefully available before the end of the year. This will be used to motivate for the area to be formally protected as a national park.
7. Detailed hunting and wood use surveys made by Portuguese-based Masters student Aimy Cáceres (July 2010). She is in the process of writing a report on her findings. This should be available by May 2011.
8. Portuguese journalist Alexandre Vaz joined the July and August 2010 visits to the mountain, taking photographs and video footage of our work. He is busy compiling a short documentary on our work. I hope this will be available before the end of the year. The mountmoco.org website will also be updated once I have received photographs from him.
9. Local support for the project is slowly being built. Huambo-based organisation Ecovisão Angola is helping keep an eye on the nursery at Kanjonde, with Juares Bongo visiting once a month. Beat Weber of the NGO Development Workshop in Huambo visited Mount Moco with us in July 2010, in order to profile the mountain and the work we are doing in an atlas they are preparing for Huambo province government with John Mendelsohn. I commented on a draft copy of the manuscript.
10. A partnership is being built with the Luanda International School to work on the Mount Moco project. About 80 seedlings were collected at Mount Moco in August 2010 and have been transplanted into the school's shaded nursery facility in Luanda. In October 2010 approximately 20 seedlings were alive and doing well. The school also collected more seedlings during a recent field trip to Mount Moco and were busy planting these. The plan is to transplant trees back at Mount Moco in a couple of years, once they have reached an acceptable size. In October 2010 I gave a half-hour presentation on our work at Mount Moco to most of the secondary school at the Luanda International School. Judging from the number of questions asked, there is a good level of enthusiasm for the project. The main challenge is that it takes 7 hours to travel from Luanda to Mount Moco, making it difficult to take school groups to the mountain.
11. A paper on the avifauna of Mount Moco, and especially the status of Swierstra's Francolin, is in press with Bird Conservation International.

Kumbira Forest Project

1. A second conservation project, at Kumbira Forest along the central scarp, was initiated in September 2010. Michael Mills, Aimy Cáceres and Fransisco Gonçalves spent three weeks in the field, conducting bird and vegetation structure surveys to establish the distribution, abundance and habitat requirements of threatened endemics Gabela Akalat, Gabela Bushshrike, Monteiro's Bushshrike and Pulitzer's Longbill. This was done by means of more than 200 point counts. We are currently busy entering our data and will start data analysis and report writing in early 2011.
2. The Administrator of Conda was interviewed regarding the possibility of acquiring land for a nature reserve in the Kumbira area.

3. Human communities were mapped and some preliminary resource use surveys made to understand the socioeconomic factors that would influence forest conservation initiatives in the area.

Mount Namba Forest Exploration

Mt Namba was visited by Martim Melo, Alexandre Vaz and Michael Mills. We were very pleased to find extensive Afromontane forests here, with healthy populations of Swierstra's Francolin (at least 7 pairs heard within 2 km of our campsite), Bar-tailed Trogon, Orange Ground Thrush, Laura's Woodland Warbler, Grey-striped Francolin, Angola Slaty Flycatcher, etc. This is certainly the most important site in Angola for Afromontane forest birds. There were some signs of human disturbance, but in general the area was very difficult to access (due to the terrain) and the habitat was in relatively good condition. We will start preparing a paper on our findings in early 2011. Results from our expedition will be used by Brian Huntley to motivate for a new protected area here, as part of the advisory work he is doing for the Ministry of the Environment.

Other ornithological findings

1. During a short visit to Tundavala near Lubango, Swierstra's Francolin was re-found where it was last recorded in the early 1970s. Intensive searching of the area by Dayne Braine a few weeks later revealed approximately 6 pairs here.
2. Two Swierstra's Francolin were captured at Tundavala and blood and feather samples collected for genetic analysis.
3. The Data Deficient Black-tailed Cisticola *Cisticola melanura* was successfully tracked down by Martim Melo, Alexandre Vaz and Michael Mills. We made the first recordings of its vocalisations, took the first photographs and captured one individual for genetic samples. This work was supported by the African Bird Club. A paper summarising this work has been submitted to the Bulletin of the African Bird Club.
4. The first Willcocks's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksii* for Angola was recorded during Black-tailed Cisticola surveys. A paper describing this has been submitted to the Bulletin of the African Bird Club.

Awareness and publicity

1. A presentation on Angolan Bird Conservation activities and priorities was made by Michael Mills at the BirdLife CAP meeting in Kasane, Botswana.
2. A presentation on the Mount Moco bird conservation project was made by Michael Mills to the Luanda International School
5. A presentation on the Mount Moco and Central Scarp forests projects was made by Martim Melo at the 2nd Portuguese Birdfair (Tim Appleton from the Rutland BirdFair was present).

6. Martim Melo was interviewed on the Mount Moco project for the Portuguese Radio 'RDP-Africa': <http://gsm.rtp.pt/icmblogs/rtp/cientificamente/?k=2010-07-17.rtp&post=27525>

Papers published

Mills MSL. 2010. Angola's central scarp forests: patterns of bird diversity and conservation threats. *Biodiversity and Conservation* **19**:1883-1903.

Mills MSL, Franke U, Joseph G, Maiato F, Milton S, Monadjem A, Oschadleus D and Dean WRJ. 2010. Cataloguing the Lubango Bird Skin Collection: towards an atlas of Angolan bird distributions. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* **17**: 43-53.

ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR 2011

In broad terms, the aims for 2011 are to continue to grow the two main conservation projects at Mount Moco and Kumbira Forest, and to make further ornithological explorations to new areas in Angola.

Main targets for 2011

1. Secure funding for further work at Mount Moco and Kumbira Forest. A second proposal to the Rufford Small Grants Foundation is currently being developed with Martim Melo.
2. Make two month-long field trips to Angola: one in April/May and the other in July/August
3. In April 2010 I will be joining a research expedition to Lagoa Carumbo in Lunda Norte Province organised by Brian Huntley, and in association with Angolan Ministry of Environment. In addition to providing distribution information on birds from a poorly known area, this exercise will help strengthen links with ministry.
4. Possibly make further ornithological explorations along the northern scarp forest, to survey more extensively for Braun's Bushshrike.
5. Purchase and register a four-wheel-drive vehicle to be stationed in Luanda, at the Luanda International School, for field work. Michael Rogerson is assisting with this.
6. Purchase and transport a shipment of 70 fuel efficient stoves to Kanjonde at Mount Moco, and train community to use stoves effectively. Or bring in an expert on fuel efficient stoves to teach the community of Kanjonde how to build fuel efficient clay stoves.
7. Continue to expand the nursery at Kanjonde and, if they are big enough, replant the first trees.
8. Continue to work with the local community at Kanjonde.
9. Research and test alternative sources of construction materials for the community of Kanjonde.

10. Write a research report (to be submitted to the Conservation Leadership Programme) on findings made during the Kumbira Forest surveys of September 2010
11. Make a formal written proposal to the Administrator of Conda, for the establishment of a nature reserve at Kumbira, and present this proposal to him in person during May 2011.
12. Continue collaboration with the Luanda International School
13. Make a presentation on work to the Angola Field Group, to garner further involvement from people resident in Angola.

Planned publications for 2011

1. Mills MSL, Olmos F, Melo M and Dean WRJ. In press. Mount Moco: its importance to the conservation of Swierstra's Francolin *Pternistis swierstrai* and the Afromontane avifauna of Angola. *Bird Conservation International*.
2. Mills MSL, Melo M, Borrow N and Vaz Pinto P. Submitted. The Endangered Braun's Bushshrike *Laniarius brauni*: a summary. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*.
3. Mills MSL, Melo M and Vaz A. Submitted. Black-tailed Cisticola *Cisticola melanurus* in eastern Angola: behavioural notes and the first photographs and sound recordings. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*.
4. Mills MSL. Submitted. The first record of Willcocks's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksii* from Angola. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*.
5. Mills MSL, Vaz Pinto P and Haber S. In preparation. Grey-striped Francolin *Pternistes griseostriatus*: skins, distribution and morphometrics. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*.
6. Mills MSL and Vaz A. In preparation. The nest and eggs of Margaret's Batis *Batis margaritae*. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*.
7. Report on the avifauna of Mount Namba, perhaps for Bird Conservation International.
8. Status of threatened birds at Kumbira Forest, perhaps for Bird Conservation International.
9. Popular science articles to be penned by the journalist Alexandre Vaz that joined the July-August 2010 expedition.

CONCLUSIONS

Angolan bird conservation and research activities have progressed well in 2010, and the projects have already outgrown my personal input. Many other individuals and organisations assisted with our work, for which many thanks (see acknowledgements). I hope there will be further opportunities for you to be involved with this work.

At this stage I plan to continue with this project for at least the next 3-5 years, until we've developed a local partner to carry forward this work independently. One of our main challenges currently is to find suitable people to train in Angola to take forward this work, as the two students we have been working with until now are not showing as much promise as initially hoped.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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