Objectifs et priorités pour la conservation des oiseaux et de la biodiversité d'Afrique


Abstract:
Biodiversity is facing an extinction crisis, with rates of species loss three orders of magnitude higher than average throughout geological history. However, neither biodiversity nor threats are randomly distributed around the planet, and so it is extremely important to target and prioritize conservation activities to make them as effective as possible in preserving biodiversity. At a global scale, priorities can be set by considering a framework of irreplaceability and vulnerability, from which biodiversity ‘hotspots' and ‘high-biodiversity wilderness areas' can be derived. Recent re-evaluation of these reveals that nine of the world's 34 hotspots and two of five high biodiversity wilderness areas lie in Africa. We assess the extent to which these conservation priorities are also priorities for bird conservation, and show that it is high. However, these global assessments do not inform conservation on the ground. For establishment of conservation targets, we require a system, driven and owned as close to the ground as possible, but following global standards, which assesses biodiversity at multiple scales of ecological organization. The finest scale at which comprehensive data are generally available is the level of the species, where we can use the IUCN Red List to determine targets for conservation. We ask how well levels of threat in birds reflect those in other taxa, and show that birds are one of the least threatened taxonomic groups. Regardless of taxon, most threatened species are best conserved through protecting areas, and so we can use information regarding their distributions to identify Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) as targets for site scale conservation. This builds from the concept of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), already applied across Africa. Based on data from East Africa and Madagascar, most species in non-bird groups appear to be represented in IBAs, although numerous additional sites can also be identified for other taxa. While the protection of sites is essential for biodiversity conservation, it will not be sufficient unless we maintain the ecological processes that allow these sites and species to persist, for which landscape interventions through biodiversity conservation ‘corridors' are necessary. African ornithologists can contribute to the process of identifying conservation targets by inspiring colleagues from other zoological and botanical disciplines to compile data in similarly comprehensive ways, by contributing directly to studies of other taxa, and above all by maintaining the flow of high quality ornithological data for the continent.