

The analysis of population trends in breeding areas could explain population crashes for some species, but long-term data would be needed, especially from places such as Khor Arba'at during migration.

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Breeding records from southern Somalia

The following observations were made during some regular ornithological field excursions of the Somali Ecological Society:

The tiny Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit *Remiz musculus* is recorded as an uncommon, local resident of bush and woodland in the arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (Britton 1980). In Somalia the species is presumed to be an uncommon resident in dry bushland north of Mogadishu (Ash & Miskell 1983).

On 4 November 1988 at 13:00 hrs this species was recorded near a water-hole in dense acacia bush covering the coastal sand-dune, some 20 km south of Mogadishu (2°N) and approximately 10 km inland from the shoreline. The bird was sitting on a perfect little cup-shaped nest made from fine plant substances, to which it carried further nesting material during the course of my observations. The nest was built in a tangle of branches of a *Commiphora* tree some 3 m above ground.

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni* has been described by Ash & Miskell (1983) as a scarce Afrotropical visitor to Somalia with one old and two recent records in August and December from the Lower Shebelle region. It is reported as local and uncommon in East and Central Africa, but as a reasonably common, local resident of the coastal lowlands of Tanzania and Kenya, with breeding records at Lake Nakuru, Kiambu, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Pemba (Britton 1980, Williams & Arlot 1980).

On 16 December 1988 at 10:00 hrs two adult Allen's Gallinules with two immatures, slightly smaller than the parents, were observed moving in and out of the reeds alongside a swampy pond near Jannaale, Lower Shebelle region, which suggests that the birds had been breeding there.

These swamps and marshes are located some 85 km south-west of Mogadishu and near the Shebelle river. After the rains they are full to capacity with water and provide refuge for innumerable birds. Apart from Allen's Gallinule I was able to observe a pair Black Crakes *Limnecorax flavirostra* with three young at the same site. A group of huge old kapok trees *Ceiba pentandra* lining the Shebelle river bank at Jannaale were covered with nests of Long-tailed Cormorants *Phalacrocorax africanus*, Great White Egrets *Egretta*

alba, Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica* and African Spoonbills *Platalea alba*. In one nest there were no less than four Great White Egret nestlings, whereas the Spoonbills had only one or two young.

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Blue-eared Glossy Starlings *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* and Wattled Starlings *Creatophora cinerea* associating with livestock

On 23 August 1989 at around 15:00 hrs we watched Blue-eared Glossy Starlings *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* and Wattled Starlings *Creatophora cinerea* associating with a large flock of sheep and goats grazing near the rocky gorge of the Kisaju River on the Kitengela Plains near Nairobi (1° 35S, 36° 48E). Both species, but mainly *L. chalybaeus*, perched freely on the backs of sheep as they moved along, and flew down to pick up food items on the ground. Others collected insects as they walked behind sheep or goats. Both species were seen to pick off ectoparasites from the ears and foreheads of sheep, balancing carefully as they did so. Birds stayed on the sheep for only short periods (up to about 30 s) at a time. They were not seen to perch on the goats, whose short slippery coats may have been more difficult to balance on than the tangled fleece of the sheep.

In their review of bird-mammal associations in Africa, Dean & Macdonald (1981) reported that Wattled Starlings in southern Africa commonly perch on various mammals, including sheep. However, they had no records of this species gleaning ectoparasites. The Cape Glossy Starling *L. nitens* regularly perches on mammals and gleans from them (Dean & Macdonald 1981), but neither behaviour appears to have been reported before for the closely related Blue-eared Glossy Starling. In these species such behaviour is evidently facultative and opportunistic, and, as Dean & Macdonald (1981) suggest, may have formed an intermediate stage in the evolution of the obligate ectoparasite-gleaning of the oxpeckers *Buphagus* spp. On this occasion large numbers of both Wattled and Blue-eared Glossy Starlings were already in the area: several fig trees in the gorge were in heavy fruit, and they had been seen feeding there earlier in the day.



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