

Status of Beaudouin's *Circaetus beaudouini* and Short-toed Snake Eagles *C. gallicus* in Kenya

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Statut du Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini* et du Circaète Jean-le-Blanc *C. gallicus* au Kenya. Les auteurs rapportent des observations du Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini* et du Circaète Jean-le-Blanc *C. gallicus* faites en 1999–2004 au Kenya et supportées par des photos. Ces observations indiquent que les deux espèces visitent le Kenya en petit nombre pendant la période octobre–avril. Les observations d'un Circaète de Beaudouin adulte observé le 21 janvier 2001 près de Mungatsi et d'un Circaète Jean-le-Blanc adulte vu le 2 février 2002 dans le Parc national de Tsavo Est sont les premières mentions pour le Kenya acceptées par le Comité d'Homologation Est Africain.

Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini* and Short-toed Snake Eagle *C. gallicus* are not known to occur regularly in Kenya. Although Brown (1974) considered Beaudouin's 'not uncommon' in Nyanza in the 1950s, he confused second-plumage Black-breasted Snake Eagles *C. pectoralis* with adults of both Beaudouin's and Short-toed (Clark 1999). Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) mention that Beaudouin's is 'regular in small numbers at Ukwala and Lake Kanyaboli in the far west, with wanderers south-east to Tsavo East in November and February, and to Mwea', thus repeating information in Britton (1980). However, these sightings were questioned by Zimmerman *et al.* (1996), who correctly state that there are no specimens, photographs or documented sight records of either taxon for the country, except a specimen of what was believed to be a Short-toed Snake Eagle, collected on 27 October 1958 at Lake Turkana (Owre & Paulson 1968; date erroneously given as 27 October 1988 by Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). This was long accepted as the only certain record of *gallicus* in Kenya until Clark & Paulson (2002) proved it to be a second-plumage Black-breasted Snake Eagle *C. pectoralis*. Stevenson & Fanshawe (2002) treat Beaudouin's and Short-toed as a single species and, without differentiating, show two occurrences on their range map in Kenya. Maps in other reference works (e.g. Kemp & Kemp 1998, Sinclair & Ryan 2003) do not suggest either species occurs in Kenya. Brown *et al.* (1982) and Orta and Kemp *in del Hoyo et al.* (1994) give the range of Beaudouin's as extending into central Kenya and barely into northern Kenya, respectively, but do not show the range of Short-toed as reaching Kenya. Ferguson-Lees &

Christie (2001) show the range of Beaudouin's as extending from West Africa east only to the Chad–Sudan border and mention that its occurrence in Kenya is uncertain, and restrict the range of Short-toed in Kenya to around Lake Turkana, doubtless based on the Owre & Paulson (1968) specimen mentioned above. Thus it is with great interest that we report on several recent sightings, including photographs, of these two species in Kenya.

Beaudouin's Snake Eagle

DF observed an adult Beaudouin's in western Kenya, on route C31 near Mungatsi on 21 January 2001; a poor-quality photo of the bird confirmed its identification. He had seen the same or a similar adult in approximately the same place in January 1999 and 2000. These sightings have been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee (EARC) as the first for Kenya. BF and IS described well an adult Beaudouin's from route C31 c.2 km from Munami, west of Mumias, on 21 January 2003, not far from the location of DF's sightings. BdB sighted a juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle in Tsavo West National Park on 31 December 2002 near Ngulia Lodge. His description accords well with the juvenile depicted in Fig. 2. WSC photographed an adult on route B1 c.5 km east of Awasi on 21 January 2004 (Fig. 1) and photographed a juvenile in the Trans-Mara section of the Masai Mara National Reserve c.12 km south of the Kitchwa Tembo camp the following day (Fig. 2).

Short-toed Snake Eagle

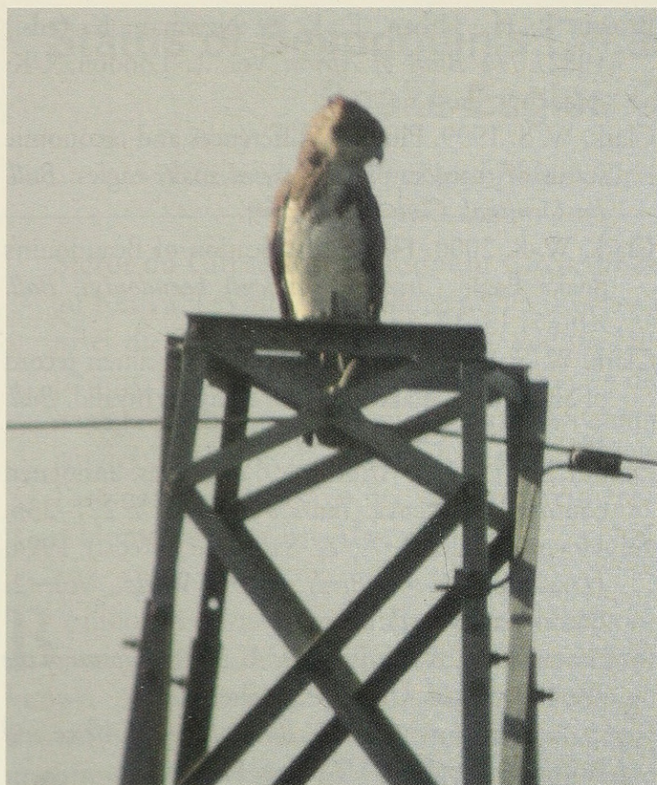
DF observed an adult Short-toed Snake Eagle on 2 February 2002 c.11 km east of Aruba Dam in Tsavo East National Park. Descriptions and a poor-quality photograph of the bird clearly show the field marks described in Clark (2000) that identify it as a Short-toed. The sighting has been accepted by the EARC as the first for Kenya. Subsequently, IS and WSC saw a Short-toed c.25 km east of Lokochogio, on 29 January 2004, and Clark photographed it in flight (Fig. 3).

One of the problems in clarifying the status of these two species in Kenya (and elsewhere) had been their lumping into a single species, which also included Black-breasted Snake Eagle. For instance, Dowsett (1993), using Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) as his principal reference, listed the three snake eagles as 'resident/vagrant' under 'Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*'. Clark (1999) demonstrated why the lumping of these three similar snake eagles was incorrect. Nevertheless, Stevenson & Fanshawe (2002) followed Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) in lumping Beaudouin's and Short-toed, but treated Black-breasted as a separate species. Determining their status had also been hampered by the lack of published definitive field marks to separate them. Clark (2000) addressed this problem; many of the field marks he drew attention to were used in the above identifications.

Our records document that both Beaudouin's and Short-toed Snake Eagles occur in Kenya in small numbers during the northern winter (October–April). We urge observers to use the field marks presented by Clark (2000) to distinguish the different snake eagles in order to better understand their distribution in Africa.

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Figure 1. Adult Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, near Awasi, Kenya, 21 January 2004 (W. S. Clark). Identified by the fine dark barring on the flanks.
 Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini* adulte, environs de Awasi, Kenya, 21 janvier 2004 (W. S. Clark). Identifié par les flancs finement barrés de sombre.

Figure 2. Juvenile Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, 22 January 2004 (W. S. Clark). Distinguished from juvenile Black-breasted Snake Eagle *C. pectoralis* by darkish brown (not rufous) underparts and underwing-coverts, and paler undersides to the secondaries.

Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini* juvénile, Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, 22 janvier 2004 (W. S. Clark). Se distingue du juvénile du Circaète à poitrine noire *C. pectoralis* par les parties inférieures et les couvertures sous-alaires brun sombre (et non rousses), et le dessous des rémiges secondaires plus pâle.

Figure 3. Adult Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Lokochoigio area, Kenya, 29 January 2004 (W. S. Clark). Differs from other snake eagles by the heavily marked underwing-coverts and lack of a broad dark terminal band on the secondaries.

Circaète Jean-le-Blanc *Circaetus gallicus* adulte, zone de Lokochoigio, Kenya, 29 janvier 2004 (W. S. Clark). Diffère des autres circaètes par les couvertures sous-alaires bien marquées de barres sombres et l'absence d'une bande terminale sombre sur les rémiges secondaires.



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Clark, William S. et al. 2005. "Status of Beaudouin's *Circaetus beaudouini* and Short-toed Snake Eagles *C. gallicus* in Kenya." *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* 12(2), 150–152. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.309753>.

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