A nest record of Oberländer's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi*

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Observation d'un nid de la Grive d'Oberlaender *Zoothera oberlaenderi*. Le 1 mars 2007, un nid de la Grive d'Oberlaender *Zoothera oberlaenderi* a été découvert dans la partie sud de la forêt de Bwindi, au sud-ouest de l'Ouganda. Le nid, placé sur une branche à 5 m de hauteur, contenait trois oisillons. Les premières photographies du nid, de la nichée, et d'un adulte de cette espèce menacée sont présentées.

Oberländer's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi* occurs in north-east Congo-Kinshasa and in western Uganda, and is known solely from a few sites in the former country (Ituri Forest, Bondo-Mabe, Kamituga area, southern Kivu and Semliki Valley) and two in Uganda (Semliki/Bwamba Forest and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest: Clement & Hathway 2000). The species inhabits primary lowland and transitional forest at 700–1,620 m (Urban *et al.* 1997), but is unknown from secondary forests (Collar 2005). In Bwamba (Uganda), this thrush is known from tall stands of ironwood trees, *Cynometra alexandri*, with a fairly open understorey, and avoids areas with dense undergrowth (Urban *et al.* 1997). The species' current status is unclear, e.g., only seven dated records have been published from Uganda since the 1960s (Carswell *et al.* 2005) including a female collected in the Itama area of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, at 1,616 m, by A. Williams, on 18 June 1969 (Keith & Garrett 1994). However, the IUCN / BirdLife International (2007) currently treats *Z. oberlaenderi* as Near Threatened, despite the lack of recent published records, e.g., from the Semliki Valley (Carswell *et al.* 2005). Urban *et al.* (1997) suggested that the species may no longer be extant in the Bwamba Forest of the Semliki Valley, owing to habitat degradation. Habitat loss may have also caused its local extinction at Beni and Kamituga (Ituri, Congo-Kinshasa: Collar & Stuart 1985), as the species appears sensitive to forest degradation (Plumptre 1997), which is extensive within its small range (Collar 2005). Moreover, conservation efforts are impeded by the fact that Oberländer's Ground Thrush remains one of the least-studied African birds, due to its elusive behaviour and tiny range; the species' breeding habits are largely unknown, and the eggs and nestlings undescribed (Urban *et al.* 1997, Collar 2005). A nest of *Z. oberlaenderi*, found in Bwindi by A. Twinomujuni in May–June 1998 (Clement & Hathway 2000), was constructed of 'dry grasses, vegetation strips and plant fibres', but was later destroyed by squirrels.

In the afternoon of 1 March 2007, in the western sector of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest 2.5 km south of Buhoma, SA heard a ground thrush singing in dense forest 12 m away beside a stream (01°01'S 29°37'E; 1,492 m). Arriving in the area from where the song emanated we observed the ground thrush in flight. Initially we were unable to obtain good views, but after a while the bird flew to a tree, where we observed that it was sitting on a nest, 5 m up in a *Carapa glandiflora*, and whereupon we were able to identify the bird as an Oberländer's Ground Thrush. Using a telescope we saw the distinctive broken white eye-ring and the rufous-brown head (Figs. 1–2). The dark vertical line through the eye was seen well on several occasions. Both adults were bringing food to the nest, suggesting that it contained nestlings. As with Black-eared Ground Thrush *Zoothera cameronensis*, which appears very shy at the nest (Lindsell 2002), the Oberländer's Ground Thrushes departed the nest whenever we approached to within 25 m. After *c.*1 hour observing and photographing the birds, TG climbed the tree to photograph the nest, which was well concealed on a small, wet branch covered by liverworts and ferns. The open-cup nest was constructed mainly of liverwort, *Plagiochila*, with a few fern stems visible inside the nest (Fig. 3). Dry grasses, which were mentioned from the first recorded nest in Bwindi Forest (Clement & Hathway 2000), were not apparent. The nest structure and its location resembled that of a nest of Abyssinian Ground Thrush *Zoothera piaggae*

Figure 1. Adult Oberländer's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi* just prior to leaving the nest, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda, 1 March 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

Grive d'Oberlaender *Zoothera oberlaenderi* adulte juste avant de s'envoler du nid, Forêt de Bwindi, Ouganda, 1 mars 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

Figure 2. Adult Oberländer's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi* on the nest, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda, 1 March 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

Grive d'Oberlaender *Zoothera oberlaenderi* adulte dans son nid, Forêt de Bwindi, Ouganda, 1 mars 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

Figure 3. Nest and nestling of Oberländer's Ground Thrush *Zoothera oberlaenderi*, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda, 1 March 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

Nid avec oisillon de la Grive d'Oberlaender *Zoothera oberlaenderi*, Forêt de Bwindi, Ouganda, 1 mars 2007 (Thomas Gottschalk)

found in Uganda, which was built of loose green moss and well concealed in dense foliage 5 m above ground (T. Butynski *et al. in* Urban *et al.* 1997). The nests of Black-eared Ground Thrush and Grey Ground Thrush *Z. princei* are somewhat different, as they are constructed of dead leaves, some twigs and dry bark (Brosset & Érard 1976, Lindsell 2002, Collar 2005). The nest held three unfeathered chicks with closed eyes. To our knowledge, the photographs of the adult and the nest are the first ever published of the species (Figs. 1–3).

On 10 February 2008 the same place was visited again. The one-year old *Z. oberlaenderi* nest was still on the tree and in good condition. After removing it from the small, unstable branch, the following measurements were taken: external diameter 140 mm, internal diameter 60 mm, internal depth 40 mm. The area of ground shaded by trees and shrubs at midday was estimated to be 10 m around the nest. Canopy closure was *c.*75% and included trees up to 26 m high. The understorey layer (trees lower than 3 m) covered 40%, the upper field layer (trees and shrubs <2–3 m) 50% and the lower field layer (shrubs >3 m) 50%.

Further data are required to elucidate the current status of Oberländer's Ground Thrush. Such data are particularly important given that Oberländer's Ground Thrush is an Albertine Rift endemic and is confined to the few remnants of primary forest in this part of East Africa.

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