

### Birds from the Albertine Rift

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*Humblotia dia*. Photo: M. Louette.

RMCA provide “digested” historical collections data that has been presented to GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility). Up to 43,443 geo-referenced occurrence records from Albertine Rift Birds can be seen (<http://data.gbif.org/datasets/resource/93>) using the recommended standards protocols (DiGIR and BioCase) and data schemas (DarwinCore and ABCD).

More collaboration in this field is also planned with Professor Charles Kahindo, University Bukavu, DR Congo, via the TDWG activities. See [www.tdwg.org/fileadmin/2008\\_conference/slides/Poster\\_TDWG2008\\_PatriciaMergen.pdf](http://www.tdwg.org/fileadmin/2008_conference/slides/Poster_TDWG2008_PatriciaMergen.pdf)

#### Publications on this subject:

Bober, S O; Herremans, M; Louette, M; Kerbis Peterhans, J C; Bates, J M (2001) *Geographical and altitudinal distribution of birds endemic to the Albertine Rift*.

Proceedings 10th Pan African Ornithological Congress, Kampala, Uganda. Ostrich (Supplement 15): 189-196.

Louette, M (2006) *Albertine Rift zoodiversity: exploitation of the historical data in the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren*. pp 103-106 In: Segers, H., P. Desmet & R. Baus. Tropical Biodiversity: Science, Data, Conservation.

Proceedings of the 3rd GBIF Science Symposium, Brussels, 18-19 April 2005, Brussels, Belgium.

Michel Louette and Danny Meirte are collaborating in a project investigating potential climate change impacts on endemic birds in the Albertine Rift, in relation to the Important Bird Area Network in the region. They are also collaborating with David Hole, Institute of Ecosystem Science, Durham University, UK and with BirdLife/WCS MacArthur.

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### Agrobiodiversity in the Alps: Establishment of a Long-Term Monitoring System

Elli Broxham

The Alpine Region provides a unique environment for agrobiodiversity. Over the centuries, animals and plants have been developed by farmers to suit the very different landscapes of the Alps. Animals were bred for hardiness, fertility and sure-footedness. Plants were selected that could cope with the harsh conditions of the Alps: high altitude, intense sun and short vegetation periods. However, this did not lead to a homogenous “Alpine” agrobiodiversity, as each valley and region has its own breeds and varieties.

Robust animals and crops are still essential in the Alpine Region. Although Alpine farmers are, naturally, also interested in high yields and large profit margins, there is also value in good average yields and for regional products. A consistent yield and a quality regional product can allow the farmer to sell in the growing “gourmet” market. Finding a place in a niche sector of the market can be far more profitable than selling standardised, over-produced products. Many Alpine farmers, due to the harsh conditions of mountain farming, can never undercut the prices of the massive, intensive, lowland farms.

The Alpine region is traditionally farmed using transhumant agricultural systems. These are important both ecologically and economically. The importance of semi-natural habitats such as the Alps cannot be overemphasised. Vast areas of Europe are now either intensively farmed or are part of the urban sprawl and the infrastructure needed to support it. Creating and managing protected areas is expensive. However, encouraging the upkeep of traditional agro-eco-systems in the Alpine region creates a large area of semi-natural habitat, which can be utilised by birds and other wildlife as well as providing space for wild plants to propagate.

In order to promote sustainable development of agriculture in the Alpine region and provide economic security for marginal areas, traditional agricultural methods rather than industrial methods need to be encouraged. This includes the conservation and promotion of traditional plants and animals in Alpine agriculture. Promoting these traditional systems also helps the conservation of Alpine wildlife, as they complement the ecosystem rather than placing additional strain upon it. Traditional farming systems help to prevent soil erosion and loss of soil fertility through the use of methods adapted over centuries, especially for the region they are used in. All these factors contribute to the production of the traditional Alpine landscapes which are attractive to tourists.

Due to the fragility of traditional plants and animals in the Alpine region, traditional agricultural systems use less imported fodder and fertiliser, thus placing less of a burden on other areas. The traditional agrarian system of the Alps has a small “ecological footprint” and its unique climate and altitude provide genetic resources adapted to harsh conditions, which may be essential for future food security in areas outside of the Alpine region.

Today it is still true in the alpine region that robust characteristics in animals and plants are of primary importance. In order to be armed against dry or wet, cold or