

The first records of Kupe Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* at two sites in Nigeria

Previously, the Kupe Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* was thought to be endemic to the forests of western Cameroon, being known only from the montane forests of Mount Kupe (Serle 1951), the Bakossi Mountains (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998) and the southern sector of the Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary (Stattersfield & Capper 2000). Here we present three records of five individuals recorded at two localities in Cross River State, Nigeria: a total of three birds in the Boshi Extension Forest in 2004 and 2007, and in 2010 a pair in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (Fig. 1).

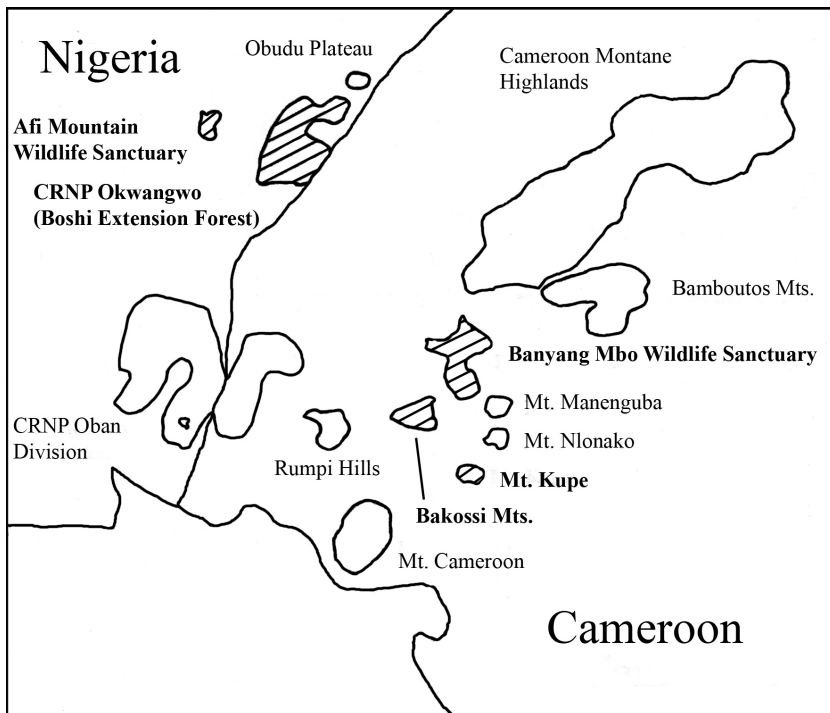


Figure 1. Nigerian and Cameroon montane highlands, with forests with Kupe Bush-Shrike records shaded.

On 16 Dec 2004, at c. 15h00, a single individual was sighted by MG in Boshi Extension Forest of Cross River National Park (CRNP), Okwangwo Division

(6°26'16''N, 9°19'26''E), at c. 1500 m altitude. The bird was observed for c. 30 s in pristine montane forest (Fig. 2). The distinctive features of grey crown and mantle, white throat, grey breast and belly, yellow vent, olive-green back, black bill and black mask separated from grey crown by white line, were recorded. There was a black neckline separating the white throat and grey breast. The bird made two short grating calls, one immediately after the other. These were similar to F. Dowsett-Lemaire's recording from Cameroon (Chappuis 2000). A recording was made (by MG) using a Sony MZ-R90 digital recorder (Fig. 3), and has been deposited at the British Library of Wildlife Sounds. On 23 Jun 2007, at c. 15h00, a foraging Kupe Bush-Shrike was sighted by II in the same area (6°25'57''N, 9°19'44''E) at 1472 m. It was shortly joined by a second; the birds then continued to forage together. They were observed for c. 10 min., in primary forest with an open understorey, on a steep rocky slope. Both had grey crown and mantle, black bill, a white line separating black mask from grey crown, white throat separated from grey breast by an unbroken black neckline, olive-green back and yellow vent. They both gleaned insect larvae from under leaves and tree branches at heights between 8 m and 12 m. The habitat was similar to that in which two individuals were recorded on Mt Kupe in Cameroon by Dowsett-Lemaire (1999).



Figure 2. Montane forest with grassland in the foreground, in the Boshi Extension of Cross River National Park, where Kupe Bush-Shrike was observed in 2004.

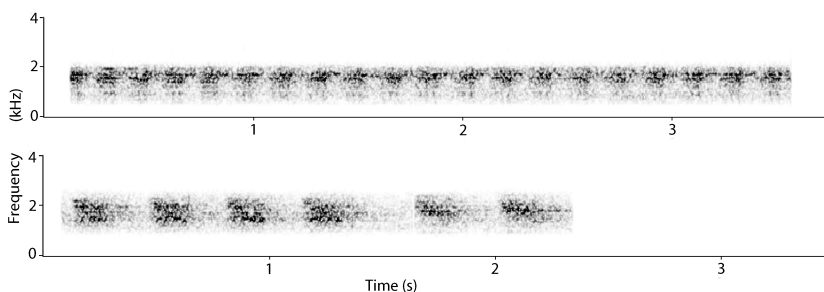


Figure 3. Frequency spectrogram of two calls made by the Kupe Bush-Shrike in Boshi Extension Forest. The second call was made almost immediately after the first.

On 6 May 2010, at c. 11h00, a pair of Kupe Bush-Shrikes was recorded by DTCC in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (6°18'30"N, 8°57'37"E) at c. 850 m. The birds were observed for 2–3 min., in primary forest with a clear understorey on a steep-sided mountain ridge. Both had grey crown and mantle, black mask and bill with a white line above the mask, and white throat separated from grey belly by a distinctive unbroken black neckline. They both had olive-green back and rump and yellow vent. The apparent pair was gleaning insects on tree branches c. 8 m above the ground; both birds made regular grating contact calls, at intervals of 0–14 s (see Chappuis 2000). The lowest altitude at which Kupe Bush-Shrike has previously been recorded was c. 900 m on Mt Kupe (Harris & Franklin 2000), with 26 records ranging between 950 and 1450 m (Bowden 2001). The low altitude of the Afi record may result from the fact that the mountain peak is only 1318 m high, resulting in there being less than 18 km² of forest above 800 m (Bergl *et al.* 2007).

Previous observers of this species in Cameroon have noted the presence of either a maroon throat spot or a black necklace. It has been suggested that this may indicate either sexual dimorphism (Fry 2000), or age (Dowsett-Lamaire 2004) with the maroon patch developing after the necklace (a necklace was recorded on the only immature specimen: Serle 1951). None of the five birds recorded in Nigeria was observed to have a maroon patch, suggesting that the patch is more likely related to age and not to sexual dimorphism.

Records of this species at two sites in Nigeria are a positive sign for the long term survival of this species, which has been classed as Endangered due to its restricted habitat range, low population density and habitat loss (<www.iucnredlist.org>, consulted 15 Jan 2011). However, due to the low recorded population densities within these montane “island” habitats, coupled with the high human pressure on the forests, we suggest that the classification should remain as Endangered. The records presented here suggest that populations may also occur in lesser surveyed montane forests of Cameroon and Nigeria. More surveys might therefore expand the known range of this

species. Our observations highlight the biodiversity value of these two sites and the need for their conservation.

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