

**Final Report of the Training Workshop on
ORNITHOLOGICAL MONITORING TECHNIQUES IN ERITREA**

(28 - 30 July, 2018)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ecological, social and economic importance of birds is well documented. Ornithology of Eritrea is still in its infancy stage, clearly not for lack of birds but because of its limited observers and lack of professionals. Bird species diversity reflects the diversity of the habitats, altitudes and climates. Five biomes are represented in Eritrea, each holding an assemblage of bird species found in that biome. Eritrea provides a home for about 577 species of which 306 species are residents(153 with proof of breeding), but this is not a definitive checklist as it includes all species which might reasonably have been identified in the country in the past 100 years. Despite international conservation efforts, many bird populations are in dramatic decline. Bird records in Eritrea are very incomplete and/or negligible, data quality is poor and bird conservation policy is in its early stage, mainly for two reasons: Many past studies did not recognize Eritrea as a separate state from Ethiopia; and years of war have severely restricted any survey work by national or expatriate scientists. Many areas have not been surveyed or visited for 50 years or more, some areas have never been investigated and many recent records are from relatively accessible areas, along or close to main roads, towns and villages.

This training workshop is organized to increase the awareness level of the participants, and the communities as well, appreciate the value of birds and, in long term, take part in the Eritrean bird monitoring scheme, and fill the information gap for the country. Moreover, initiate the formation of national/local bird club, key step as focal point for bird monitoring scheme and sharing information.

2. TRAINING OBJECTIVES

The training workshop has been organized to generate trained personnel with substantial information needed to track the trends of bird population and enhance bird life monitoring scheme in Eritrea.

Training workshop was given to local actors(scout) recently awarded free ABC membership from African Bird Club. It was organized to train candidates' acquire the basic skills required for bird observation and monitoring scheme, collect scientific data on birds. Generally, the goal of the training workshop, in long term, is to effectively promote monitoring and conservation of

birds and their habitats in Eritrea through building local capacity. Specifically, the workshop aims to:

- Promote participants' self-esteem, and improve knowledge to effectively sensitize others on the significance of conserving birds and their habitats.
- Help develop basic skills of bird identification techniques, basic scientific data collection and data processing methods.
- Introduce participants to the distribution, status, ecology, and migration of birds.
- Train participants in the care and use of field equipment
- Initiate formal establishment of National Bird Club.

3. METHODS

The training workshop was held in College of Health Science, Asmara-Eritrea, which was run for three days (28 to 30 July, 2018). 13 personnel were in attendance, including facilitators and representatives from local partners. The three-day training was led by Mr. Russom Teklay (PhD candidate), Rezene Habte (lecturer) and Dawit Berhane (Private naturalist).

The training workshop includes theoretical (lecture presentation) and practical (field) sessions. The lecture presentation was given on Day 1, 2 and 3; while the practical session was conducted on Day 2 and 3.

Moreover, evaluation form was distributed to participants at the starting date, which was later collected, to assess the overall success and limitations of the training workshop.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Lecture presentation:

The lecture presentation was presented in a power-point format which includes five modules, each with a brief discussion session and/or extensive field works.

Module 1: *Understanding Birds*: This module was made to provide an excellent introduction to birds in general; and the value of birds to the ecosystem and human being in particular. Participants were asked to name at least 10 locally known birds, think about and share why birds

are important to them. Trainees were also motivated to share what they know about certain species they see around their homes and cornfields. This really helps participants to evaluate themselves at the end of the event. Moreover, participants were encouraged to share their knowledge of bird's figure in local stories and legends.



Fig: Lecture presentation on bird identification techniques.

Module 2: Bird Diversity and Birding in Eritrea: This module designed to introduce participants with the general overview on history of birding, geographic and habitat diversity and challenges in Eritrea, with more emphasis to global importance of Eritrea, as migration route and stop-over location for many palearctic migrants(especially waterbirds, warblers and raptors). A range map of migratory, resident and regionally endemic birds has been displayed to facilitate comparison. Parallel to that participants were provided list of Eritrean birds, with special emphasis to regionally endemic and limited range species.

Module 3: Bird Identification Techniques, Use and selection of Equipment: There is no one simple way to identify birds in the field. Thus, this module introduced participants with the basic skills of bird identification techniques which include deciphering a variety of visual and behavioral clues. This include: relative size, body shape, color and color patterns, bill shape, special behaviors (including habitat preference, flight patterns, feeding habits, etc), range and habitat they occupy, and other auditory clues. This module has accompanied with extensive field work.

Parallel to that, participants were introduced with proper selection, use and care of binoculars, field cameras and field guides. Participants were provided with variety of field equipment to give the participants an opportunity to see what choices are available to them.



Fig: Students learning practically on how to identify birds in the field

Module 4: Bird counting, Recording and Managing data: This module, parallel to bird identification techniques in module 3, is the most important of all. Thus, participants were introduced with systematic counting techniques(site coverage, counting methods), concept of taking field notes and data management techniques, partially adopted from wetland international, which was accompanied with intensive field works. Overall, participants were encouraged to develop their own data collating sheet.



Fig: Trainees having a briefing in the field

Module 5: Initiating National Bird Club: Bird club offers an opportunity to meet birders with varying experience, share and contribute to the collective knowledge of the group. Apart from social interaction, it helps contribute to valuable avian research to help further the knowledge and preservation of many bird species. Having this in mind, participants were divided in groups to facilitate panel discuss on “Why Bird Club?” Participants emphasize the advantages of forming local bird club in Eritrea.

Field Walk:

Parallel to lecture presentation, practical sessions has been organized to empower overall bird monitoring techniques. Trainees were visited many sites around Asmara and beyond, mainly IBAs, where they can apply identification techniques, bird counting and recording data. Beside to this, the bird walk was very important to promote conservation ethics, build alliances between individuals, develop leadership and guiding skills, and practice proper use and care of equipment.



Fig: Trainees practicing in the field with the assistance of facilitators



Under the guidance of facilitators participants were divided in to small groups equipped with binoculars, common field guide books, data recording sheets and other related things. Each session has started by giving a simple briefing on criteria's for bird identification and note taking techniques. Participants were trained in the field and applied all of bird monitoring techniques at most. After each session, trainees were composed a list of birds identified during the outing, classified them as land or water birds and present their findings to the audience as a group for discussion correction. Moreover, participants were asked to summarize their general observation, especially behavior the birds display in the field, habitat preference by each species, body size and shape of the birds identified in the field.

5. CONSERVATION IMPACT

As mentioned above, bird record in Eritrea is very incomplete and/or negligible, data quality is poor and bird conservation policy is in its early stage. At the same time, the public's understanding of birds, and related issues to do with conservation activities and sustainable resource use, is often desperately poor. Decision-makers, unfortunately, are not immune to this lack of awareness. To carry out the research needed to underpin effective bird conservation, educate the public and create awareness, and to enthuse & inspire younger scientists & conservation workers, we need well-trained personnel. This requires a broad range of skills at many different levels, including species identification, scientific data collection, making field descriptions, and monitoring bird life. Moreover, bird tourism initiatives require trained guides that can able to identify species accurately.

In Eritrea, as most tropical countries, the lack of capable and motivated birders is the major constraint. In this training workshop, participants are trained to develop basic skills of bird identification and counting methods to a level where they can contribute meaningful data to large-scale schemes - such as national bird monitoring scheme.

6. CONCLUSION

During the three-day training workshop, participants were given basic skills of bird identification, bird counting, data collection and habitat description techniques. Both lecture presentation and field sessions were more informative, according the participants. Trainees are well prepared and are expected to contribute to the national level bird monitoring scheme.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the training workshop, important recommendations were made by the participants, which include the following:

- ✓ The need of field equipment and materials, including binoculars and field guide, are highly emphasized.
- ✓ Similar workshops should be organized to upgrade and empower monitoring skills
- ✓ Group field visit should be arranged to different sites to increase knowledge on birds
- ✓ The need of forming national bird club is critical

8. BUDGET

The greater part of the fund was spent for accommodation and meal of trainees and facilitators, and most of the rest on hiring transportation during the field session, as well as some stationery and printing costs. Details can be provided, if required.

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