

## **Project Update: March 2010**

I have recently produced a paper in the *African Journal of Ecology* describing changes in the status of the threatened warbler *Karamoja apalis* in the Serengeti, based on surveys funded by the Rufford Small Grants Foundation in 2005 and 2006. Essentially, the story it tells is that:

- An increase in wildebeest numbers in the Serengeti during the 1960s-70s led to an increase in grazing pressure and a reduction in the destructive impact of seasonal grass fires, enabling whistling thorn (on which the *apalis* depends) to regenerate more effectively.
- This enabled the *apalis* to colonise the Serengeti during the early 1990s, and to spread north into southern Kenya by 2004.
- Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. Whistling thorn appears to have a natural cycle of about 30 years, and has declined in the Serengeti over the past 10 years. Since around 2005, *Karamoja apalis* sightings have also decreased, suggesting that its population has declined substantially.
- However, provided that the Serengeti's herbivore population remains high – as seems likely - both the whistling thorn and the warbler are likely to recover, given time.

It is unusual to be able to identify the sequence of events triggering the expansion of a threatened species in Africa. This has been possible as a result of the support received from the Rufford Small Grants Foundation, combined with the long-term ecological monitoring carried out by numerous researchers in the Serengeti over the years.