Gallery forests in Eastern Kenya – land-use conflicting the conservation of Kenyan endemic species

The river systems of Eastern Africa are important life-lines in the dry and warm lowlands. These rivers were originally surrounded by gallery forests providing habitats for many animal and plant species, and important ecosystem services like ground water, fertile soil, wood and shadow. Intensive settlement along these river systems and the exploding human population caused the destruction of most of these former interconnected forests, which exist today as highly fragmented, isolated and small forest patches. Species living in such forest remnants mostly suffer under these environmental conditions. The bird species Hindes Babbler Turdoides hindei is a Kenyan endemic taxon found in still intact gallery forests (but also – and today mainly) in the surrogate habitat, the Lantana camara thicket. Telemetry analyses on that species will be conducted during a summer-fieldtrip in a highly degraded riparian ecosystem close to Kitui, Eastern Kenya. We will asses habitat use, foraging behaviour, and the effects from habitat fragmentation on species highly dependent on ‘closed vegetation’ - like T. hindei. Furthermore, old field-maps will used to compare the past extent of gallery forests (from the year 1960) with the recent status. Based on these data we will create habitat suitability maps and detect potential barriers and the potential landscape permeability.

Dr. Jan Christian Habel, Mitarbeiter, Wissenschaftszentrum Weihenstephan, Lehrstuhl für Terrestriche Ökologie