

# wanted: GREATER HONEYGUIDE SIGHTINGS

*Honeyguiding.me* is a citizen science research project to better understand the remarkable cooperative relationship between humans and the Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator*. We invite all birders and bush enthusiasts to submit their sightings of Greater Honeyguides (whether the bird guided you or not) anywhere in Africa. These records will enable us to map the current extent of guiding behaviour, to track it over time, and in the process help shed light on how honeyguides acquire their ability to engage with humans.

The specialised relationship between the Greater Honeyguide and humans is an extremely rare example of animal–human cooperation that has evolved through natural selection. Bird and human collaborate to gain access to bees’ nests, from which humans acquire honey and honeyguides obtain wax. Honeyguides know where bees’ nests are located but cannot get at the wax by themselves, whereas humans aren’t nearly as good at finding bees’ nests, but have fire to subdue the bees and tools to open their nests. As a team, they can gain more food than either would on their own. The consequent mutualistic partnership between this bird and man is probably ancient – perhaps even older than our own species, given that our ancestors are thought to have mastered the use of fire up to 1.9 million years ago.



DOMINIC CRAM

*We welcome all records of both adult and immature Greater Honeyguides. Please tell us the age of the bird if you know it: immature Greater Honeyguides have distinctive yellow underparts that start out wholly yellow and reduce to a yellow breast patch as the bird approaches the end of its first year.*

While the honeyguide–human mutualism was probably once common throughout sub-Saharan Africa, it is now much reduced. Honeyguides do occasionally attempt to guide humans in many African countries, but as far as we know the mutualism only really thrives in a few remote areas where people still rely on a regular supply of wild-harvested honey.

We are interested in understanding how this mutualism is maintained across time and space. Through the *Honeyguiding.me* citizen science project, we hope to learn where guiding still occurs in Africa, giving us a baseline against which to monitor future changes. This will also allow us to test specific ideas about how honeyguides gain and lose their ability to guide humans.

Please help us! Visit our website at *Honeyguiding.me* and submit your Greater Honeyguide sightings from anywhere on the continent. We’ll ask where and when you saw (or heard) a Greater Honeyguide, whether it was an adult or had the distinctive bright yellow underparts of juveniles/immatures (if you know this – it is important information for us) and whether the bird guided you. Mapping where Greater Honeyguides are present but rarely or never guide people is as important as a guiding record, so please send us all your records, including those when the bird did not attempt to guide you.

We welcome recent sightings and those from the past – this could be the perfect time to re-live happy birding trips through your old notebooks! We would also appreciate any additional information, such as whether you were

*Please send us your Greater Honeyguide sightings at Honeyguiding.me*

guided to a bees’ nest and whether the bird you saw showed any other interesting behaviours, such as feeding from man-made beehives or interacting with host species (since Greater Honeyguides are also brood parasites). There’s also an option to upload any photographs, videos or sound recordings associated with your sighting.

These questions form part of our wider project on understanding the ecology and evolution of honeyguide–human mutualism, funded by the European Research Council and based jointly at the FitzPatrick Institute and the University of Cambridge. For more information on our other honeyguide research, visit [www.AfricanHoneyguides.com](http://www.AfricanHoneyguides.com)  
JESSICA VAN DER WAL & CLAIRE SPOTTISWOODE

Read more about Claire Spottiswoode’s honeyguiding research experiences in Africa in ‘One Good Turn’, *African Birdlife*, March/April 2017.

For more information, contact The Director, FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa 7701. E-mail [fitz@uct.ac.za](mailto:fitz@uct.ac.za), tel. +27 (0)21 650 3291 or visit [www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za)