PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

A.PROPOSAL: Listing of *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in Appendix I and in Appendix II

B.PROPONENT:**The Government of the Republic of South Africa**

C.SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1.Taxon

1.1. Class:	Aves
1.2. Order:	Passeriformes
1.3. Family:	Hirundidae
1.4. Genus & Species:	*Hirundo atrocaerulea* Sundevall, 1850
1.5. Common names:	
English:	Blue Swallow
Spanish:	
French:	
German:	Stahlschwalbe

2.Biological data

2.1.Distribution

Breeds in restricted parts of southeastern Africa, migrates to eastern Africa.

2.2.Population

Disappeared from 21 out of 29 known breeding localities in South Africa and Swaziland during 20th century; in 1992, there were c 60 pairs in these two countries; in 1996, there were 71 pairs in South Africa, and the total population was estimated to be c. 200 birds. There is no quantitative data for the remainder of its breeding range (Malawi, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe).

2.3.Habitat

Montane grasslands, mainly from 900-2200 m.a.s.l., with high rainfall; nesting habitat specialized, nest placed in sinkholes, potholes along subterranean streams, Aardvark Orycteropus afer burrows, old mining and prospecting shafts; vicinity of nest must be open grassland; a consequence of territoriality of this species is that nests are well-spaced, so utilization of habitat patches is low.

2.4.Migrations

Blue Swallows migrate to the Lake Victoria basin in eastern Africa for the nonbreeding season.

3.Threat data

3.1.Direct threats

None.

3.2.Habitat destruction

Sensitive to even minor modification of its pristine habitat; commercial afforestation with pines, wattles and eucalypts is primary threat, destroying prime grassland habitat and reducing streamflow. The resulting fragmentation of habitat forces birds to feed over smaller ranges and limits their choice of feeding area in relation to highly localized weather conditions, especially mist. Elimination of burning results in nest site entrances becoming overgrown; overgrazing leads to flash floods which modify rivers so that they are unsuitable as nest sites. Urbanisation, roadbuilding, mining, agriculture (especially sugarcane), and other forms of disturbance and habitat encroachment impact nest-sites.

3.3.Indirect threats

As above, under Habitat destruction.In addition, the disturbance caused by close approaches of humans to nests has been documented to reduce breeding productivity.

3.4.Threats connected with migration

Unknown, but habitat fragmentation is likely to be a problem.

3.5.Utilization

None documented, but hunting is thought to occur in some nonbreeding areas.

4.Protection status and needs

4.1.National protection status

Full protection status in South Africa.

4.2.International protection status

Not listed in CITES appendices. Classified as `vulnerable' by BirdLife International.

4.3.Additional protection needs

All breeding sites should be documented and listed, and afforestation permits should not be granted in or near these areas. Underground breeding sites should be kept open by an appropriate burning programme.

5.Range States

a: South Africa (B), Zimbabwe (B), Swaziland (B), Mozambique (M), Malawi (B), Zambia (B), Zaire (NB), United Republic of Tanzania (B & NB), Uganda (NB), Kenya (V), Rwanda (V) (Dowsett 1993).

a B = breeding range, NB = nonbreeding range, M = migrant, R = rare, V = vagrant.

7.Additional remarks

Research is required on the nonbreeding grounds, which lie mainly in Uganda, to determine if there are threats at this stage of the annual cycle.Monitoring of the nest sites should continue; because of sensitivity to disturbance this has to be done circumspectly.Research is required into appropriate burning regimes to keep nests sites open. Of all swallows, the Blue Swallow is one of most sexually dimorphic in plumage; it is the only swallow to build a mud nest that does not build its nest using mud pellets - it lays down layers of premixed mud and straw. The Blue Swallow is a biodiversity flagship species for the conservation of the grassland biome in South Africa. It is an indicator species of pristine montane grassland ecosystems. The

plight of this species throughout its breeding range is a consequence of the lack of provision of protected areas in its grassland habitat, which have been systematically replaced by commercial forestry plantations. This charismatic swallow could make an avitourism contribution to the economies of the areas in which it breeds, but strict guidelines to prevent negative impacts from birdwatchers are needed.

8.References

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