

African Bird Club



THE NATURAL
HISTORY MUSEUM

23 MAR 2005

PURCHASED
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Bulletin of the African Bird Club

Vol 12 No 1 March 2005

House Bunting in
Tunisia

White-backed
Night Heron in
Burkina Faso

Observations of
Anambra Waxbill

Yellow-capped
Weaver is not a
'nuthatch-weaver'

Weavers nesting
in man-made
structures

Birding Tunisia

Bimaculated Lark
in Seychelles

Chaplin's Barbet

Pied and Somali
Crows in Eritrea

Barau's Petrel off
southern Africa

Great Bittern in
Uganda





African Bird Club

The African Bird Club aims to:

- provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology
- encourage an interest in the conservation of the birds of the region
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- publish a twice-yearly colour bulletin
- encourage observers to visit lesser known areas of the region
- encourage observers to actively search for globally threatened and near-threatened species
- run the ABC Conservation Programme

Registered Charity No 1053920

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ABC Membership

Membership is open to all. Annual subscription rates are:
Individual Europe & Africa: UK£18 Rest of the World: UK£20
Family Europe & Africa: UK£21 Rest of the World: UK£23
Student Europe & Africa: UK£10 Rest of the World: UK£12
Supporting UK£30 minimum
Life UK£350

To join or for further details please visit the ABC web site (where there are secure on-line payment facilities) or write to the Membership Secretary—see contact information below.

ABC Website

<http://www.africanbirdclub.org>

Contact ABC

African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA.

E-mail: info@africanbirdclub.org • website: <http://www.africanbirdclub.org>

Further information can be obtained directly from individual Council members by writing to them at the Club's postal address, or by e-mail as follows:

Chairman	Phil Atkinson	chairman@africanbirdclub.org
Secretary	Flip Bruce-Lockhart	secretary@africanbirdclub.org
Treasurer	John Caddick	treasurer@africanbirdclub.org
Bulletin Editor	Guy Kirwan	editor@africanbirdclub.org
Conservation Officer	Steph Tyler	conservation@africanbirdclub.org
Information Officer	Keith Betton	info@africanbirdclub.org
Membership Secretary	Bill Quantrill	membership@africanbirdclub.org
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The Bulletin of the African Bird Club

The Bulletin of the ABC provides a forum for news, letters, notices, recent publications, expedition results, reviews and interim publication of studies on African birds by contributors from throughout the world. Publication of results in the Bulletin of the ABC does not preclude publication of final results as journal papers either by the ABC or elsewhere. No

material should, however, be submitted simultaneously to the *Bulletin of the ABC* and to any other publication.

Brief notes for contributors appear elsewhere in this Bulletin and further details are available from the Editor (editor@africanbirdclub.org).

ABC BULLETIN VOL.12.1: ERRATUM

*Page 1: Front cover plate caption: in a moment of madness, the Editor wrote that the bird featured on the front cover is a Houbara Bustard. As many keen-eyed members will no doubt have spotted (and as the Editor well knows!) it is in fact an Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis Arabis**

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by Martin Woodcock

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Mark Andrews

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Ron Gerlach, Guus Hak, Mike
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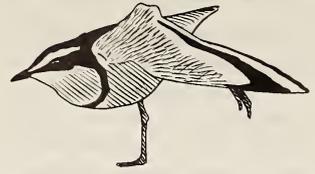
The geographical area covered by the African Bird Club

L'aire géographique couverte par le Club Ornithologique Africain



- | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Azores | 22 Guinea | 43 Kenya |
| 2 Madeira | 23 Sierra Leone | 44 Tanzania |
| 3 Canary Islands | 24 Liberia | 45 Rwanda |
| 4 Cape Verde Islands | 25 Côte d'Ivoire | 46 Burundi |
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| 8 Gulf of Guinea Islands | 29 Benin | 50 Angola |
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| 10 Algeria | 31 Cameroon | 52 Botswana |
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| 12 Libya | 33 Equatorial Guinea | 54 South Africa |
| 13 Egypt | 34 Gabon | 55 Lesotho |
| 14 Sudan | 35 Congo | 56 Swaziland |
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| 16 Niger | 37 Uganda | 58 Comoros |
| 17 Mali | 38 Ethiopia | 59 Aldabra |
| 18 Mauritania | 39 Eritrea | 60 Seychelles |
| 19 Senegal | 40 Djibouti | 61 Mascarene Islands |
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| 21 Guinea-Bissau | 42 Socotra | |

Club News



ABC at the 11th Pan-African Ornithological Congress, Djerba Island, Tunisia, 20–26 November 2004

If only migration across Africa were as easy for humans as for birds! During the 11th Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC), at Djerba Island, Tunisia, last November, one of the liveliest discussion topics was the heroic effort many had made to get there. South Africans travelled via London or Frankfurt, others from south of the Sahara via Paris, Brussels or Geneva, and a group from Uganda by way of Dubai and Lebanon. Another group from West Africa, alas, found themselves stranded when Abidjan airport was closed and missed the Congress altogether.

PAOC, held every four years, is the major gathering of those involved in the study of the continent's avifauna and working to conserve Africa's birds and habitats. The host this time was BirdLife International's Tunisian partner, Les Amis des Oiseaux (AAO), which, at over 800 members, is amongst the largest and longest established birding organisations in Africa. This was third time lucky for them—they had made two previous bids to host PAOC but lost out each time—and they seized the occasion to lay on a superb Congress.

PAOC is, of course, more than just a scientific gathering. It is also an occasion for people with an interest in African birds from around the world to meet, renew acquaintances, put faces to names increasingly familiar from websites, e-mails and printed publications, and catch up on recent developments in their fields of interest. The great pity is that more people, particularly from the growing cadre of young African ornithologists, were unable to take advantage of this opportunity. Some

200 people did attend PAOC 11, but many more who would have liked to be there were prevented from so doing for financial reasons—more on this below.

The congress theme was *Oiseaux sans frontières—Birds Crossing Borders*. Peter Jones, of Edinburgh University, gave the keynote address with an emphasis on intra-African migration, demonstrating how the annual north–south movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone provoked large-scale migrations within Africa, involving up to 40% of the continent's birds. He also showed how the annual influx of Palearctic breeders was able to fit into this pattern. This, and the symposia on various detailed aspects which followed, awakened lively debate.

The scientific programme was coordinated by Adrian Craig, of South Africa, who will also edit the full congress proceedings, due to be published in *Ostrich* in early 2005. Any non-subscribers wishing to obtain a copy should consult BirdLife South Africa for details. As well as the main theme, other topics covered by the symposia included conservation, wetland birds, seabirds, grassland birds and the birds of North Africa, including their importance in arts and traditions.

This was the first PAOC to be held in North Africa, producing a strong turnout of ornithologists, not only from Tunisia but also from Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Libya. The many presentations from these countries revealed just how much novel research is being undertaken in this region where the Palearctic and Afrotropical zones meet. One happy outcome was a determination by the various groups in these countries to coordinate their work more closely in future.

ABC's role as a sponsor of the Congress was gratifyingly well publicised. ABC financed the official programme and abstracts book, and made a substantial contribution to the fund to support attendance by young African ornithologists. As on previous occasions, ABC offered prizes of three-years' free membership for the best poster and best symposium presentation by students.

The poster competition provoked a lively discussion among our judging panel. Eventually a short-list of five was decided, and from these the unanimous decision was that the prize should go to Dianah Nalwanga, of Uganda, for her poster concerning the results of a study into the effects of agricultural intensification on biodiversity, using birds as indicators (Fig. 1). ABC financed her study, but this was really not a factor in our decision! Dianah is already an ABC member, thus her free membership will commence in 2005. Others short-listed were: Shalheddine Selmi, Tunisia (Blackbirds *Turdus merula* in southern Tunisian oases), Sarah Nachuha, Uganda (Waterbirds in the rice paddies of eastern Uganda), Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, Kenya (Status of Blue Swallows *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in their Kenyan non-breeding grounds) and Muchai Muchana, Kenya (Relative abundance of migrant and resident avifauna in Mwea National Reserve, Kenya).

A decision concerning the student presentation proved even more difficult. Marks were awarded for the quality of the science but also for presentation. Fortunately, there were a good number of well-balanced presentations that scored highly on both counts, although many others that did so on the first count were awarded very few for presentation. Finally, it proved impossible to decide between two excellent presen-

tations, thus awards of two years' free membership were made to Krissie Krook (South Africa), who had researched the effects on the avifauna of changes to the grassland mosaic in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park; and Gloria Kirabo Bitebekezi (Uganda), who described research undertaken into the way cooperation with the local population around Entebbe international airport had succeeded in reducing the number of potentially dangerous collisions between birds and aircraft (Fig. 2).

Other students deserving special mention were: Flavienne Asse (Côte d'Ivoire), Sebastien Jacquemet (Réunion), Jessica Kojadinovic (France), Jacinta Abalaka (Nigeria), Mary Molokwu (Nigeria) and Kariuki Ndong'ang'a (Kenya).

Another message from the Congress was the need for better coordination between visiting birders and local organisations. There are

now bird recorders for most African countries (the list published in Bull. ABC 9: 58-60 is regularly updated), and it is important that significant observations are reported to them. Concern was also expressed over the activities of visiting researchers who pursue their studies without consulting or even informing local ornithologists. If a comprehensive picture is to be obtained of the population dynamics of African birds, it is essential that all such activities are properly coordinated.

The PAOC Committee (on which ABC is represented) met under its outgoing Chairman, Sam Kofi Nyame, to enact future plans. New committee members were selected to replace those who had served their term, and Christine Dranzoa was elected to the Chair. BirdLife South Africa had submitted a bid to host PAOC 12 in 2008, which was approved unanimously.

The ABC representatives left with fond memories of the welcome received from our Tunisian hosts, and of the pleasure in making new acquaintances and renewing old ones, but saddened that so many were unable to attend. The young African ornithologists present gained much from the experience, but few could have afforded to be there at their own expense. The Congress organisers made strenuous efforts to fund the attendance of as many Africans as possible, but there was a long list of well-qualified candidates for whom funding was unavailable. ABC made a substantial contribution to this fund, and would like to do more next time. If every member set aside just two or three pence, centimes or cents every day, we could finance the attendance of 40-50 young Africans at the next PAOC in South Africa.

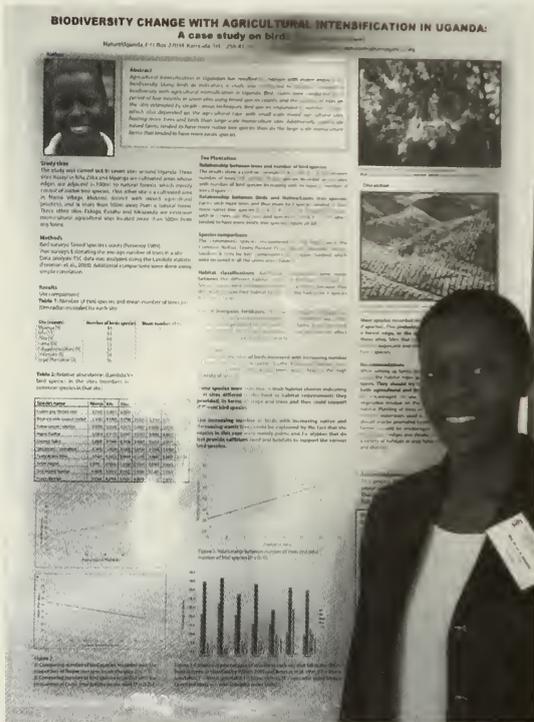


Figure 1. Dianah Nalwanga, of Uganda, with her award-winning poster / Dinah Nalwanga, Ouganda, avec son 'poster' gagnant (Rowena Quantrill)



Figure 2. Krissie Krook, of South Africa, and Gloria Kirabo Bitebekezi, of Uganda, receiving their awards from Bill Quantrill / Krissie Krook, Afrique du Sud, et Gloria Kirabo Bitebekezi, Ouganda, recevant leur prix de Bill Quantrill (Rowena Quantrill)

Phil Atkinson stands down as ABC Chairman

At the AGM in March 2005, Phil Atkinson stepped down as Chairman of Council, ending seven years in the post and nine on Council. Phil is only the second Chairman of ABC, following Martin Woodcock, who steered the Club in its formative years. Phil was charged with consolidating the work done by Martin, ensuring that the initial momentum was not lost, and building-up the Club to the thriving institution it is today.

He was well qualified for the task. Hooked on birds from an early age, Phil became interested in African avifauna whilst at university in Norwich, when he and a group of colleagues undertook an expedition to São Tomé to search for four of the island's endemics that had not been seen for 75 years. To their delight, they found three of the four. Expeditions to Sierra Leone, Senegal and Ethiopia followed, and when a vacancy on Council arose in 1996, Phil was a natural choice. He became Chairman two years later.

At that time, ABC was still predominantly for European birders interested in Africa. Plans to develop African membership and to become involved in protecting African birds were part of ABC's mission from the outset, but in the early years the emphasis was inevitably on establishing a solid foundation. When Phil arrived that groundwork was complete, enabling him to focus on launching the Conservation Fund and encouraging greater African involvement—two matters of critical importance to him.

Phil can view with great satisfaction the extent to which he has succeeded in these objectives. The Conservation Fund has taken off, receiving a steady stream of excellent project proposals, and supported financially not only corporately but by the many members who make donations additional to their regular subscriptions. Giving the Club an African dimension has proved hard-

er, but Phil has persisted and ABC now has members in 33 African countries, with local payment schemes in five and two more in the pipeline. For Phil, flying the flag for ABC at PAOC 10 in Kampala was a highlight. At the previous PAOC, in 1996, ABC was still in its infancy and few had heard of it. In Kampala, four years later, Phil found that everyone seemed to regard it as 'their' club. When asked at the opening ceremony to accept a special commemorative shield in recognition of ABC's contribution to African birding, he could feel that efforts to make the Club known in Africa had been worthwhile.

Other particular satisfying achievements have included overseeing the development of the Bulletin, and that of the ABC website (in which he has been closely involved). In the future, Phil hopes that African involvement will continue to increase, but also hopes to see the Club become more directly involved in pushing back the frontiers, with members venturing to lesser-known corners of the continent. Phil was instrumental in launching the new 'ABC Conservation Tours', together with Birding Africa (a Cape Town-based group). These tours will visit poorly explored areas of Africa, with part of the tour fee being donated to the Conservation Fund.

The Club owes a huge debt to Phil for his tremendous input, despite many simultaneous pressures, firstly to complete his PhD and since then holding down a full-time job. Those of us who have sat with him through long Saturday afternoons thrashing out Club policy at Council meetings will miss his imposing presence at the head of the table. Phil modestly claims that management is not his strong point, but he certainly managed to bring common sense to the running of the Club and to ensure that the disparate members of Council remained focused on their various tasks.

In the meantime, Richard Webb has agreed to stand for election to

succeed Phil as Chairman of the ABC Council—more about that in the next Club News.

British Birdwatching Fair 2004

The 2004 fair was an occasion for gumboots and umbrellas. Nonetheless, due to the titanic efforts of the organisers in coping with all the problems created by one of the wettest Augusts on record, the show went on—bigger, better, more ambitious than ever. And, of course, the birdwatching public flocked there in thousands.

ABC, as usual, was there, with a stand manned by a team of volunteers, mostly from Council but with a few non-Council members as well. Despite a generous subsidy to the cost of the stand from Carl Zeiss Ltd, participation is a major expenditure, second only to costs associated with the Bulletin. But there is no doubt that it is money well spent. The stand acts a meeting place for existing members—almost 20% visited the stand in 2004—and is an opportunity to make ABC known to the many potential members visiting the Fair. We also display Club merchandise, discover what members want from ABC and publicise our activities, particularly ABC's conservation work.

The undoubted star of the ABC show in 2004 was the fabulous painting by ABC President Martin Woodcock, which featured on both the new Club T-shirts and a range of bags launched this year (see www.africanbirdclub.org). The bags proved so popular that they sold out on the third day (new stocks are available—visit the website before they run out again!). T-shirts have also been selling fast, to members and non-members alike. Profits on sales, plus takings from our raffle and lucky dip, more than covered the cost of the stand. We also recruited a dozen new members, and renewed several lapsed memberships, which all added to the positive balance sheet—as did savings on postage costs for those Bulletins col-

lected by members from the stand. ABC will be at the Fair this year, on 19–21 August. Do come and see us, meet other Club members and collect the autumn Bulletin, which as usual we will be distributing.

Membership

After steady growth over the first 5–6 years, our membership has remained at between 1,200 and 1,250. Some 2,355 people have been part of the Club during the past decade. About half are long-term members with us for five or more years. The rest are a shifting population who join the Club for a year or two and then move on. Each year we recruit c.100 new members, but a similar number of existing members leave. We have surveyed those who leave to discover why. Virtually none cite dissatisfaction as a reason. Some leave for financial reasons, whilst other people joined when planning a trip to Africa, then lost interest having no further plans to visit the continent.

The Club is a truly international organisation. In late 2004, there were members in 68 countries, 33 in Africa, 19 in Europe, nine in Asia, four in the Americas and one in Australasia. In Africa, the largest numbers are in the countries with local payment schemes, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Madagascar and Seychelles. The UK remains the country with the largest number of members, followed by the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium and Scandinavia.

Risk Assessment

As a UK-registered charity, ABC is required to undertake an annual risk assessment. In 2004 we drew up a comprehensive chart listing all possible risks, the likelihood of each arising and the potential seriousness if it did. We also listed measures to be taken to counter them. The picture that emerged was largely reassuring: we have sound procedures to guard against fraud, insurance cover against any liability likely to arise from any

actions by the Club, our finances are soundly managed, our databases and other vital records are properly backed up, etc.

One or two points did give some cause for concern. As the Club has grown and developed, administrative duties have become more complex and time-consuming. Until now, we have always found volunteers willing to undertake this work, but are conscious that at any time we could find ourselves unable to fill a key vacancy. We need a steady flow of volunteers willing to join Council: if you can help, please do put yourself forward. We are also conscious that, until now, the Club has operated within tight financial margins, which has caused no problems whilst expenses have been predictable, but leaves ABC potentially vulnerable to any unanticipated sharp increase in costs. ABC has therefore established a reserves policy, under which the Club aims to build up reserves equivalent to six months' income. A copy of the full risk assessment is available to members from the Membership Secretary.

Website

Have you visited the ABC website recently? In September 2003 we introduced many new features, of which one of the most significant was the addition of a secure payment facility, making it possible to renew your membership, purchase Club merchandise or contribute to the Conservation Fund online in confidence. An increasing percentage of all income now comes from this source.

At the 2004 AGM, we announced plans to develop a new Internet resource, jointly with Birding Africa, as a primary source of information concerning African birds. The focus is on providing country-specific information and it is aimed at birders planning a visit to an African country, tourists with an interest in birds, and people undertaking general research into a country's ornithology. Since then we

have been developing a web page for each African country. John Caddick has coordinated this project, with support from more than 60 members. Assuming all has gone to plan, by the time you read this the first parts should be available—simply follow the links from www.africanbirdclub.org. This is both a complex and a long-term project, and remains work in progress. Much hard graft has gone into making the site as accurate and comprehensive as possible, but we are conscious that errors and omissions are practically inevitable in a work of such magnitude. A long list of requirements for future phases—photographs, maps and checklists—already exists. Most of all, however, the success of the site depends on your contributions. If you have any suggestions for improvements do send ABC your comments.

Literature Review

For several years the Literature Review has been published as a printed supplement to the March Bulletin each year. Following a full review of the Bulletin in autumn 2003 it was decided not to print this, but hopefully to provide it as a fully searchable online database (see note in *Bull. ABC* 11: 2).

Following that note, various means of publishing the review were considered and unfortunately for various technical and financial reasons, as well as being a considerably greater workload in the compilation, a searchable database was abandoned, at least for the foreseeable future. However, the issue containing literature for 2003 was placed on the ABC website in summer 2004 as a Microsoft Word document, and all those from 1994 to 2002 were added to the website as well (www.african-birdclub.org/resources/litrsuppl.html). All these can be downloaded free.

It is intended to do the same for subsequent reviews, although it is again likely to be summer 2005 before the next issue is ready. A con-

sequence of this slightly later publication date is that most material with a publication date of 2004 will be included, rather than having a cut-off date of late November, which had happened previously, thus necessitating the inclusion of material from more than one year per issue.

Any member without access to the Internet may request a hard copy of the literature review from the Sales Officer; a small charge will be made to cover the costs of printing and postage.

Peter Lack

Conservation Fund

Last year donations from members reached an unprecedented level, enabling ABC to finance a range of projects. One member who sent a generous donation stated that she did not want her money to support projects such as that described in the last Bulletin, involving the eradication of House Crows *Corvus splendens* in Cape Town, arguing that such work was unjustifiable on ethical or economic grounds, and remarking the argument that such species were more of a health hazard

than native species was a pretence. Others may disagree—do let us know your opinions. For now, we wish to make the point that donors are at liberty to specify how their contribution is used. Clearly, it is easier for the Club to administer the conservation programme if given maximum flexibility in the use of funds, but if any member wishes their donation to support a specific project ABC will do all it can to meet those wishes.



African Bird Club Conservation Fund

ABC Conservation Fund News

No new awards have been made since August as the Club had already awarded UK£9,000 during 2004. Reports from previous projects that have been awarded grants continue to trickle in. It is hoped that most of these will be published in the Bulletin in due course.

Further information...

For further information about the African Bird Club Conservation Programme, please write to Stephanie Tyler, African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK, or by e-mail to conservation@africanbirdclub.org

Requests for Information

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* ringing scheme

A total 22 adult Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* and 94 chicks were fitted with colour rings in the breeding areas east of Lake Tengiz near Korgalzhyn, in central Kazakhstan, in summer 2004. The birds were marked with coloured plastic rings above the tibio-tarsal joint according to standard protocols for waders. Colours used during 2004 were red, pale blue, yellow, black and white. Five juveniles were also fitted with Russian metal rings on the left tarsus. The scheme is part of a new long-term study sponsored by BirdLife International on this globally threatened steppe species. The study organisers would be grateful for any re-sightings to help record survival, and especially movements, during the non-

breeding season. One of the species' key wintering areas is in Eritrea. A summary of African records is presented in *Bull. ABC* 11: 34–35. Sightings, with details of colour combinations, location, date and number of individuals observed, should be sent to Dr Will Cresswell, Bute Medical Building, University of St Andrews, Fife KY16 9TS, UK. Tel. +44 (0)1334 463010, e-mail will.cresswell@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Data on Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* in Africa wanted

With the help of local village communities, John Clarke has been surveying Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata* for the last four years in south Worcestershire, UK. The species is in serious decline in the UK—down by 80% in the past

20–30 years. Whilst gathering information on the species in its African wintering grounds, he found few published data, and from contacts in Africa he gained the impression that perhaps little is known of *M. striata* winter ecology. John would be interested to know where birds are found, how long they stay, in what sort of habitat, if they have a fixed feeding territory, whether they are solitary or occur in groups, information on diet, their perceived predators—and so on. Any information received may be included in a booklet currently in preparation. All contributions will be duly acknowledged. Contact: John Clarke, Ivy Cottage, Kemerton, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL320 7HY, UK. E-mail: jclarkekem@btinternet.com.



General

Taxonomy, nomenclature and evolution of the Procellariiformes

MtDNA cytochrome-*b* sequences (some of them already previously used by Nunn and Stanley in their 1998 work) have been used to re-examine the phylogeny of the Procellariiformes. The resultant paper suggests some striking new findings. The authors, who worked within the framework of the multidimensional Biological Species Concept, reject the many splits among albatrosses proposed by Robertson & Nunn (1998), and discovered an apparently surprising strong relationship between the storm-petrels and albatrosses. The storm-petrels are considered to belong to two subfamilies, Hydrobatinae and Oceanitinae, whilst the genus *Oceanodroma* was found to be paraphyletic and the taxa therein thus regrouped into four genera: *Hydrobates*, of which *Oceanodroma* becomes a junior synonym, *Cymochorea*, *Halocyptena* and *Thalobata*. Furthermore, Penhallurick and Wink suggest that *Macronectes halli* should be merged into *M. giganteus* and that the shearwaters formerly assigned to *Puffinus* should be clustered into two genera: *Puffinus* and *Ardenna*, with *P. creatopus* best regarded as a subspecies of *P. carneipes*. *Lugensa* is recognised as a distinct genus with its closest affinities to *Pachyptila*, but the genetic data suggest that prions should be grouped into just two species: *P. tur-tur* and *P. vittata*. In addition, *Bulweria* groups with *Pseudobulweria* and *Procellaria* and the molecular data support the recognition of the

subgenera *Pterodroma*, *Hallstroma* and probably *Cookilaria*.

Source: *Emu* 104, pp 125–147

Phylogeny of shearwaters

In a separate paper, a molecular phylogeny, also based on mtDNA cytochrome-*b* gene analysis, was used to test and reassess systematics and conflicting taxonomic treatments of the small, black-and-white *Puffinus* shearwaters, including the *P. assimilis/lherminieri* species complex. Three geographically discrete clades were identified, in the North Atlantic, Southern (Australasia), and tropical Pacific and Indian oceans, that contain most of the *P. assimilis/lherminieri* taxa. Together with four other lineages (*P. puffinus*, *P. opisthomelas*, *P. mauretanicus*/*P. yelkouan*, *P. newellii*/*P. myrtae*), they form an unresolved polytomy, to which *Puffinus buttoni*/*P. gavia*, *P. nativitatis* and *P. subalaris* are basal. None of the current taxonomic treatments of the *P. assimilis/lherminieri* complex were supported by the results of the new phylogeny, which instead suggested that 14 taxa should be recognised and that five others (*loyemilleri*, *colstoni*, *nicolae*, *polynesi-ae* and *atrodorsalis*) are phylogenetically undifferentiated from more widespread species (*lherminieri*, *dichrous* and *bailloni*) and are probably invalid. The authors of the study suggest that similarities in plumage and external morphological characters between unrelated species, and differences between closely related species, imply that characters traditionally used taxonomically are, in this group, poor indicators when attempting to predict phylogenetic relatedness.

Source: *Auk* 121, pp 847–864

DNA analysis of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* subspecies

DNA analysis of the six subspecies of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (five in the Old World and one in the New) by Michael Wink and co-workers identified two clades. Within each clade intraspecific variation appeared to be very low. This is particularly true for the first clade, which contains nominate *chrysaetos* and the race *homeyeri* of Spain and North Africa. The researchers suggest that the recognition of *homeyeri* might not be justified. The slight genetic difference observed in the phylogenetic tree for the eagles in Mali, where a small breeding population occurs in the Adrar des Iforas, compared to birds of the Palearctic or North Africa, is indicative of a long isolation. This could have occurred following one of the dry periods in the Sahara c.50,000 to 150,000 years ago. Ethiopian Golden Eagles differ even more, which suggests an earlier separation, which could date from c.200,000–300,000 years ago.

Source: *Alauda* 72, pp 153–155

Species limits in *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais*

A recent paper in the monthly journal *British Birds* presents an interesting overview of recent developments in species- and subspecies-level taxonomy within the genera *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais*. Although the main focus of the article is on Western Palearctic taxa, the paper offers a useful review for African readers of the most modern developments relating to the taxonomy of these genera. The possibility that several taxa of *Hippolais*, from the Olivaceous *H. pallida* and Booted Warbler *H. caligata* groups, is also

discussed. It has been suggested that the name *Iduna* might be used for these taxa, either at the level of sub-genus or even genus. Furthermore, in a short communication in *Ibis*, David Pearson and colleagues, return to the issue of the identity of the *Hippolais* warblers apparently breeding in mangroves in northern Somalia and Eritrea (see *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.* 122: 222–228), establishing through mtDNA comparisons that these birds are the recently split Sykes's Warbler *H. (caligata) rama*, the first records for the African continent.

Sources: *Br. Birds* 97, pp 276–299,
Ibis 146, pp 683–684

Name of Afrotropical mainland race of Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

In a recently published note, Murray Bruce and Robert Dowsett demonstrate that if the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* population of Bioko, which was originally described as an endemic race *poensis* (Fraser 1843), is not recognised as different from the Afrotropical mainland birds, known as *affinis* (Blyth 1862), then the name *poensis* replaces *affinis* because it is the oldest available name. As no firm evidence of differences warranting the separation of *poensis* from *affinis*

exists, *affinis* becomes a junior synonym.

Source: *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.* 124,
pp 184–187

Proceedings of the 6th World Conference on Birds of Prey & Owls

The Proceedings of the 6th World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls, held in May 2003 in Budapest, Hungary, have been published. The hefty volume of 890 pages contains 81 refereed original papers, in English, presented by more than 150 authors. Papers present the most up-to-date state of research and conservation of diurnal and nocturnal raptors worldwide. An extensive section is devoted to vultures, severely threatened in many parts of their former range, comprising 12 papers on Old and New World species and their conservation, together with eight special studies providing a comprehensive picture of the recent catastrophic decline of *Gyps* species in southern Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, the hitherto inexplicable cause of which was first revealed during this conference. To find out more about this book and the conference (including over 160 abstracts) visit www.Raptors-International.de

Source: www.Raptors-International.de

Threatened birds of the world 2004: available for free and now on the web too!

In March 2004, BirdLife International released *Threatened birds of the world 2004*, a CD-ROM with species fact sheets for all of the world's birds. This was the end result of over two years' review and updating of information presented in *Threatened birds of the world*, published in 2000. BirdLife are grateful to the many ABC members who contributed to the update. IUCN Red List categories were revised for 226 species, and the total number of globally threatened birds has now

risen to 1,213 species. The CD contains detailed fact sheets and additional data tables for all threatened and near-threatened species, as well as for all 772 Least Concern species for the first time. This information forms the bird component of the 2004 IUCN Red List. *Threatened birds of the world 2004* is being distributed freely by BirdLife to make the information as widely available as possible.

By the time you receive this issue of *Bull. ABC*, all this information will also be available on BirdLife's website www.birdlife.org. On the CD and the website you can search for information on particular species or groups of species by family, genus, species, common name, region, country or Red List category. For Club members in the Afrotropical region who have difficulty accessing the internet, BirdLife will be happy to supply a free copy of the CD-ROM: please e-mail science@birdlife.org with your postal address.

As part of their annual rolling programme of keeping information and IUCN Red List assessments of the world's birds up to date, BirdLife are already reviewing the status of another c.70 species, to feed any potential revisions into the next IUCN Red List. Please click the Globally Threatened Bird Update button on the BirdLife homepage to visit the threatened bird discussion forums, where you can view topics describing the species currently under review and contribute your information and opinion on the proposed revisions, as well as suggesting additional species whose IUCN Red List status may now need revising. Input from birders in the field is very valuable, and any input that is used in updating assessments or fact sheets will be explicitly acknowledged.

Source: *Stuart Butchart* in litt. 2004



Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
by Mark Andrews

North Africa & North Atlantic Islands

Northern Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita* fitted with satellite transmitters

Three Northern Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita*, two adults and a 2004 juvenile, were fitted with satellite transmitters in 2004, to monitor their movements.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 9(4), p 15

West & Central Africa

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* breeding in Niger

The first breeding records of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* in the Air massif, Niger, were reported by Michel Clouet and Jean-Louis Goar in 2004. Two breeding sites were discovered in the southern part of the massif. Laying occurred in mid-October and mid-November 2003, which corresponds to the laying period in the Adrar des Iforas in Mali, at the same latitude. Prey items found at the eyries were mainly hares. This small, relict, breeding population, which has probably been isolated for thousands of years, appears to be extremely vulnerable to human persecution: birds are being deliberately killed, poisoned and captured. The researchers failed to see any birds in immature plumages during their four visits to the area in 2001–2004, which may be indicative of high juvenile mortality.

Source: *Alauda* 72, pp 151–152

Movements of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* tracked by satellite

Bernd Meyburg and co-workers tracked the migrations of three young Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* from France and Bulgaria by means of satellite telemetry. The two French vultures migrated almost

simultaneously and, after travelling c.3,570 km, remained in southern Mauritania, whilst the Bulgarian bird, after travelling 5,340 km, ended its journey in south-east Chad. When crossing the Sahara, the latter flew more than 500 km on two successive days (1,017 km in total). In January and February, it wandered extensively over 2,600 km, as far as north-east Nigeria. Both French vultures remained in their adopted home ranges in Mauritania, which extended 69,000 km² and 50,000 km², respectively. One first left its African home range when three years old.

Source: *J. Ornithol.* 145, pp 273–280

Sudan rebels poaching ivory in DR Congo

Poachers linked to the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army are killing elephants for ivory in DR Congo. Poachers were initially interested in bushmeat in Garamba National Park, near the Sudan border in the north-east, but have now extended their activities. A park official has estimated that only 14,000 African Elephants *Loxodonta africana* remain in DR Congo, compared to 90,000 before the civil war began in 1997.

Source: *Africa Geographic* 12(5), p 14

East Africa

Ethiopian conservationist gains prestigious award

Mengistu Wondafrash, who is studying for a MSc in Environment and Development in the International & Rural Development Department, University of Reading, has won a prestigious Biodiversity Leadership Award for his tireless efforts over the past nine years to protect endangered bird species, especially in his native Ethiopia. He will receive US\$180,000 from The Bay Foundation and the Josephine Bay

Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundations, which are pioneers in promoting efforts to save biological diversity.

The award is testimony to Mengistu's contribution to environmental conservation in eastern Africa, where he has worked under unfavourable conditions. Possibly his most significant accomplishment is his work to safeguard the future of the Endangered White-winged Flufftail *Sarothrura ayresi*. He has helped create and protect the wetland breeding habitats of the flufftail, which is believed to number only 750 globally. Mengistu also coordinates the Important Bird Areas programme in Ethiopia and manages the Ethiopian component of the African Waterfowl Census. He plans to use the money from the award to continue developing his conservation projects, and in particular to build the Ethiopian Wildlife & Natural History Society, which he has helped expand over the last eight years.

Press release 18 August 2004

New national park in Rwanda

In 2004, the government of Rwanda proclaimed Nyungwe forest a



Red-collared (Mountain) Babbler
Kupeornis rufocinctus
by Mark Andrews

National Park. The reserve covers c.90,000 ha and is an Important Bird Area where 275 bird species have been recorded, amongst which are Albertine Owlet *Glaucidium albertinum*, Kivu Ground Thrush *Zoothera (piaggae) tanganjicae*, Red-collared (Mountain) Babbler *Kupeornis rufocinctus* and Shelley's Crimson-wing *Cryptospiza shelleyi*. It is also home to 13 species of primate. After the Itombwe Mountains in eastern DR Congo, Nyungwe probably ranks as the most important forest for the conservation of montane birds in the region.

Source: Wildlife Conserv.,
June 2004, p 10

Cattle allowed to graze in Ugandan park

Semliki National Park authorities have been directed to permit cattle keepers to graze their animals in the park. Game rangers have been accused by residents to be corrupt and to harass them whenever they grazed their cattle in the park. Semliki National Park covers 21,900 ha and is an Important Bird Area where many species of the Guinea-Congo biome reach their easternmost limits. No fewer than 70 bird species are only known within Uganda from Semliki.

Source: Africa Geographic 12(4),
p 13

Rwenzori Mountains removed from danger list...

Rwenzori Mountains National Park, Uganda, has been removed from UNESCO's List Of World Heritage Sites in Danger. The park, which is contiguous with Virunga National Park in DR Congo, had originally been listed because of civil unrest, lack of funding, poaching and encroachment, but the situation has now improved and park management has regained control of the area. The c.99,600-ha park has the second highest number of Albertine Rift

endemic bird species of any Important Bird Area in Uganda.

Source: Africa Geographic 12(7),
p 10

...but Virunga National Park threatened

In 2004, a significant portion of Virunga National Park, DR Congo, was deforested. Some 6,000 people are reported to have moved into the area, deforesting c.15 km², using the cleared areas for agriculture and livestock. The park supports more than half of the world's c.700 Mountain Gorillas *Gorilla gorilla beringei* and is a World Heritage Site and an Important Bird Area.

Source: Africa Geographic 12(7),
p 10

Breeding biology of two African Sylvia warblers studied

In a two-year study in Kenya, Hans-Christian Schaefer and co-workers studied the breeding biology of *Sylvia lugens* and *S. boehmi*. These two species were previously included in the genus *Parisoma* and called Brown Parisoma and Banded Parisoma, but recent molecular studies have revealed that the genera *Sylvia* and *Parisoma* form a monophyletic group and should be merged in *Sylvia*. Compared to their temperate congeners, it appeared that, in general, the two African species have smaller but more numerous clutches, longer developmental periods, higher nest predation rates, lower annual fecundity and longer post-fledging care.

Source: Ibis 146, pp 427-437

Tons of timber stopped in Tanzanian port

The Tanzanian government has imposed a ban on the export of timber and seized 157 containers of logs, many of which were harvested illegally from the coastal forests of Rufiji, Kilwa and Lindi districts in the south-east of the country. The containers were locked out by the ban deadline before they could be loaded

onto ships. Hundreds of other logs may be stockpiled in forests or en route to the port from logging sites inland. The ban on logging for export became effective 1 July 2004, following a gazette notice by the Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism. TRAFFIC, WWF and local groups including the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group and Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania are hailing the government's commitment to halting illegal logging in this Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests of Tanzania and Kenya biodiversity hotspot.

The coastal forests of Rufiji, Kilwa and Lindi districts of south-east Tanzania are not only priority sites in terms of biological importance but are amongst the least studied in the hotspot. They are rapidly becoming the most vulnerable coastal forests due to uncontrolled extraction of timber and other forest resources, following the completion of Mkapa Bridge over the Rufiji River in August 2003, the largest bridge of its kind in east and southern Africa.

Source: CEPF E-News
September 2004

Tanzania Birdlife Club started

Students of the University of Dar es Salaam and professional bird guides have started a bird club to further nature conservation and promote appreciation and study of birds in Tanzania. The main activity so far has been the organisation of bird walks in the Dar es Salaam area. Of Tanzania's 1,000+ bird species, c.470 have been seen in the Dar es Salaam area. Those wishing to join the club should e-mail birding_tanzania@yahoo.com or tel. +255748490399 or +255745811906.

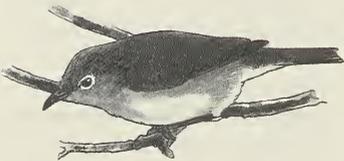
Source: Karekoona Abdou in litt.
July 2004

Indian Ocean islands

Survival of Mauritius Olive White-eye *Zosterops chloronothos* requires immediate action

Mauritius Olive White-eye *Zosterops chloronothos*, a Mauritius endemic restricted to wet upland forests, is currently classified as Critically Endangered. It is the least known of the eight threatened terrestrial bird species remaining on the island. Surveys undertaken between November 1998 and February 2001 by Rina Nichols, Lance Woolaver and Carl Jones estimated that 93–148 pairs remained in an area smaller than 25 km². Most areas that held white-eye territories during a first survey in 1975 supported considerably fewer territories in 2001. The main causes of this decline are thought to be deforestation, degradation of native habitat and nest predation by introduced mammals. The researchers point out that survival of the species requires immediate action, including predator control in important known breeding areas, improving food sources by planting appropriate fast-growing native flora, establishing new wild populations using breeding enclosures within the upland forest, and the establishment of a captive breeding population.

Source: *Oryx* 38, pp 291–296



Mauritius Olive White-eye *Zosterops chloronothos* by Mark Andrews

Southern Africa

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* bites off more than it can chew

A Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* was found dead with a large cicada in its mouth, near Strydenburg, Northern Cape, South Africa, in 2004. The insect was later extracted with considerable difficulty and identified as *Masupha delicata*. Barn Swallows mainly feed on small flying insects, enabling them to ingest the food in flight. In this case, the bird obviously misjudged the size of its prey—with fatal consequences.

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 9(4), p 8

Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseus* poisoners convicted

Three men who poisoned and killed 24 Blue Cranes *Anthropoides paradiseus* with diazinon at Trompsburg, Free State, South Africa, in November 2003, were found guilty and face a fine of R140,000 each or 20 years' imprisonment. The Poison Working Group and South African Crane Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust welcomed the successful conviction as being of great significance for wildlife conservation and pesticide misuse in South Africa. During the past 50 years, nearly 80% of southern Africa's Blue Crane population has been lost, mostly due to pesticide misuse. Each year the Poison Working Group responds to c.70 major wildlife poisoning cases, very few of which are successfully prosecuted.

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 9(4), p 13

Project to stop the killing of owls by road traffic

More than 1,000 dead owls have been recorded on the South African N17 toll road between Spings, Gauteng, and Devon, Mpumalanga, in a three-year period. This owl mortality is directly linked to grain

spillage from transport vehicles. Grain on roads attracts rodents and the owls quickly realise that prey is concentrated there. To draw owls away from the road, a project has commenced in which 'owl and rodent restaurants' have been established along the N17. These 'restaurants' are situated at least 1 km from the highway, with poles being erected as perches for owls. Grain is put out daily in an attempt to attract rodents and thus lure owls away from the road. The project is also attempting to keep grain off the highway. Transport companies are requested to ensure that grain loads on trucks are covered with tarpaulins and that loading gates are spillage-proof.

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 9(4), p 13

Ban on military aircraft flights near Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* colonies

Several years of negotiations by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) have resulted in new South African Air Force regulations stipulating that military aircraft will no longer be permitted to fly within 25,000 feet (7.62 km) of Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* colonies. The action follows information from local landowners who reported that military aircraft were disturbing vulture colonies in the Magaliesberg area. The EWT hopes that commercial aircraft will now follow suit.

Source: *Africa Geographic* 12(5), p 15

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* killed by lions

During a game drive along the Grumeti River, in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania, a pride of Lions *Panthera leo* was seen feeding at a buffalo kill. Over 50 vultures and an immature Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* were also there, waiting for their chance to feed. At the approach of the vehicle, a Tawny Eagle *Aquila*

rapax flapped clumsily along the ground, unable to take off. It appeared to have a broken wing and the game guide suspected that it might have been wounded by one of the Lions. When he returned to the scene the following morning, he found the eagle dead in the grass, with two large puncture holes in its flank and a large bite mark in a wing, proving that the bird had indeed been bitten by a Lion.

Source: The Ecological Journal 5

'Fitztitute' gains prestigious award

The Percy FitzPatrick Institute at Cape Town, South Africa, was awarded Centre of Excellence status by South Africa's Department of Science and Technology and the National Research Foundation, in June 2004, following an intensive international peer-review process. The Fitztitute, as it is affectionately known, was founded in 1959 and has become a post-graduate research institute affiliated to the Zoology Department of the University of Cape Town, building a significant international reputation for the research and teaching of ornithology and conservation biology. The Centre of Excellence status will bring to the institute significant research support for ten years (subject

to ongoing performance) for its post-graduate students and staff, as well as for key team members based at other South African institutions.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 9(4), p 12

Internet resources

African birding websites

North Africa

Birding Egypt

<http://www.birdingegypt.com/>

West & Central Africa

Gambia Birding

<http://www.gambiabirding.org/>

Gulf of Guinea Cons. Group

http://www.ggcg.st/birds/bird_intro.htm

East Africa

Nature Kenya

<http://www.naturekenya.org/>

Kakamega Bird List

<http://www.uky.edu/~cfox/Students/Savalli/KakaBirdList.html>

Kenya Birds

<http://www.kenyabirds.org.uk/>

Tanzanian Bird Atlas

<http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com/>

East African Wildlife Society

<http://www.eawildlife.org/>

Nature Uganda

<http://www.natureuganda.org/>

Uganda Bird Guides Club

<http://www.ugandabirdguides.com>

Indian Ocean Islands

Nature Seychelles

<http://www.nature.org.sc>

Southern Africa

BirdLife Botswana

<http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw/>

National Museum of Namibia

http://www.natmus.cul.na/birds/bird_ept.html

BirdLife South Africa

<http://www.birdlife.org.za/>

Percy Fitzpatrick Institute

<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick/>

Avian Demography Unit

<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/>

Cape Town Pelagics

<http://www.capetownpelagics.com/>

Zululand Birding Route

<http://www.zbr.co.za/>

Zest for Birds

<http://www.zestforbirds.co.za/>

SA Birding

<http://www.sabirding.co.za/>

Zambia Tourism

<http://www.zambiatourism.com/travel/wildlife/birdlife.htm>

BirdLife Zimbabwe

<http://birdlife.mweb.co.zw/>

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ernst Mayr 1904–2005

In early February, as this Bulletin went to press, Ernst Mayr, one of the principal architects of the neo-Darwinian synthesis of genetic and evolutionary theory, died after a short illness at the age of 100. His long and incredibly productive career spanned the fields of ornithology, systematics, biogeography, evolutionary theory, and the philosophy and history of science. His ideas on the origin of species, known as the Biological Species Concept, developed after his pioneering bird sur-

veys in New Guinea and several Pacific Islands in 1928–30. In 1953 he joined the Department of Zoology at Harvard University, where he continued to work as Professor Emeritus until his death. Generally recognised as 'one of the grand masters of twentieth-century biology' (E. O. Wilson) and 'a writer of extraordinary insight and clarity' (Stephen Jay Gould), his numerous books include *Systematics and the Origin of Species* (1942), *Animal Species and Evolution* (1963), *Populations, Species and Evolution*

(1970), *One Long Argument: Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought* (1991) and *This is Biology* (1997). In 2001, at the age of 96, he published *What Evolution Is*, an up-to-date and comprehensive book on evolution aimed at a general audience, and, with Jared Diamond, *The Birds of Northern Melanesia: Speciation, Ecology and Biogeography*, the result of decades of work on, as the authors put it, 'the proximate and ultimate origins of species'.

Notes on the distribution of House Bunting *Emberiza striolata* in Tunisia

Rolf Schneider

Notes sur la distribution du Bruant striolé *Emberiza striolata* en Tunisie. Un aperçu est présenté des données de la littérature et des observations personnelles de l'auteur sur la distribution et la nidification du Bruant striolé *Emberiza striolata* en Tunisie. Des observations de l'espèce au centre du pays et à Sfax suggèrent une expansion vers le nord de son aire de nidification.

In southern Tunisia, House Bunting *Emberiza striolata* (Fig. 1) is omnipresent and conspicuously confiding, replacing House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in settlements on the fringes of the Sahara. The bird is said to be a lucky charm (M. Souf pers. comm.). Unlike other birds, it is therefore not persecuted and tolerated as a fellow occupant of houses and courtyards.

House Bunting's historical range in Tunisia equals a sharply outlined area around the great salt lakes bordering the Sahara desert in the south and the foothills of the Atlas Mountains in the north. This pattern of distribution is so obvious that it is reflected in a nursery rhyme well known to people in the Nefzoua oases, although an increasing number of reports indicate that a range extension is ongoing in Tunisia, similar to that in Morocco since the late-19th century (Courtaille & Thévenot 1988). In the early-20th century the species' range reached Gabes, but since then observations of House Buntings have also been made in central Tunisia (Etchécopar & Hüe 1964). Nevertheless, the situation in Tunisia remains inadequately known, particularly because House Bunting has been rather neglected in the literature. It is hoped that the following notes, the result of several visits to the country, will stimulate further work on this interesting species and its spread.

Distributional data in the literature

Whereas detailed distribution maps of House Bunting, based on a topographical grid, have been prepared for Morocco (Courtaille & Thévenot 1988) and Algeria (Isenmann & Moali 2000), comparable data for Tunisia are lacking. Works on North African birds (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962, Etchécopar & Hüe 1964), as well as more recent handbooks (Cramp & Perrins 1994, Snow & Perrins 1998), show very imprecise and even

contradictory distributions (Fig. 2). Summarising all available data, a broad outline of the range of House Bunting in Tunisia was presented by Courtaille & Thévenot (1988), namely the area between Tataouine in the south, Nefta in the east and Kairouan in the north. It is uncertain, however, whether this map is based on observations of single birds or of resident breeding pairs. Information concerning numbers and population density is also rare. Thus, the real pattern and limits of distribution are open to question.

Although the subspecies *E. s. sahari* is considered to be commensal, unlike the principally Asian nominate form *E. s. striolata*, there is some evidence of rural breeders in rocky habitats (Courtaille & Thévenot 1988). Similar observations have been made at Jebel Cherichera and Jebel Cherahil in Tunisia (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962, Lombard 1965). Given that most ornithological observations are from a relative handful of sites, further observations of birds breeding away from settlements seem likely.

Personal observations

Study area

Most observations were made on two visits to Tunisia following the traces of the ancient Royal Saxon Africa Expedition led by J. E. Hebenstreit and C. G. Ludwig in 1732–33 (Grosse 1902). The first visit (17 February–8 April 1992) consisted of a circuit starting from Tunis and including Kairouan, Sfax, Gabes, Kebili, Gafsa, Kasserine, El Kef and Tabarka, before returning to the capital. The itinerary permitted a thorough exploration of the oases and mountains both north and south of the Chott el Djerid, as well as the Dahar and the national parks of Bou Hedma, Sidi Toui and Jebil. The second visit (28 February–4 April 1997) fol-

lowed a similar route. In addition, I spent several weeks in Kebili and other oases of the Nefzoua (16–30 September 1993, 17 March–27 April 1995) in order to study the nesting ecology of House Bunting (Schneider 1998).

Observations

House Buntings were found in nearly all parts of the Nefzoua, a cluster of *c.*50 oases and several palm plantations within an area of 1,600 km² south of the Chott el Djerid (Fig. 3). They were present in villages as well as the municipal centres of Kebili and Douz. Breeders were even found at buildings far from villages, e.g. at an isolated farm in the desert near Fetnassa (27 March 1995), or in the ruins of the governor's palace and the chapel of Sidi Ben Ghaluf, in the sand dunes south of Kebili (23 September 1993, 24 March 1995). The species was met with in considerable densities in 'ghost towns' such as the ancient oases of Limaguess (8 March 1997) and Kebili (16–30 September 1994, 17 March–27 April 1995). However, during the final visit, in spring 1995, buntings could not be found in the villages of El Faouar and Sabria, on the edge of the desert.

Birds were found in nearly all settlements along the road leading to Gabes traversing the foothills of Jebel Tebaga (Limaguess, Bordj Saidane, El Hamma: 8 March 1997; Gabes: 20 March 1992). Mareth (20 March 1992) was the southernmost site on the coast where singing males were found. There was none, however, on Djerba Island or on the nearby mainland at places such as Medenine and Ben Gardane during the visit in 1993.

Numerous observations were made in the Dahar, where the species was present in nearly all settlements between Matmata (5 March 1992) and Tataouine (21 March 1992). The mountain villages Chenini and Douirat (21 March 1992) were the southernmost outposts of House Bunting. There, as well as in Toujane (5 March 1992), nesting birds were also noted in abandoned houses higher in the mountains.

On the north side of the Chott el Djerid, House Buntings were common in the oases from Degache to Tozeur and Nefta (8 March 1992, 15 March 1992, 24 April 1994). Gafsa (16 March 1992, 31 March 1992, 4 March 1997) and nearby oases (Lalla: 5 March 1997, El Guettar 17 March 1992, 5 March 1997) were also occupied.

A line transect in the Medina of Gafsa (5 March 1997) produced 12 singing males per 1 km.

Further east, there was no sign of the species anywhere in the Orbata Mountains in 1992, except for a breeding pair at the headquarters of Bou Hedma National Park (19 March 1992), which was both the eastern- and northernmost record of the species that year. However, subsequently an eastward spread along the north side of the Chott el Fedjadj, in 1997, was noted, with a breeding pair at Bordj Oum Ali (5 March 1997).

Several other findings from the 1997 trip through central Tunisia are worthy of mention. Prior to 1993, I had not found any House Buntings in this area, but three pairs were observed displaying at the archaeological site of Sbeitla (1 March 1997) and five individuals were observed amongst a flock of Spanish Sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis* near Feriana (2 March 1997), where two males were singing constantly and duetting with females from the steep faces of the quarry (Fig. 4). However, none was found in the village of Feriana. The first observation of House Buntings in Sfax was in 1990 (H. Dlensi pers. comm.). We found at least six males singing within the Medina with a suspected breeding pair in Dar Jalouli (9 March 1997).

Conclusions

House Bunting is a characteristic species of southern (Saharan) Tunisia, with three geographically disjunct centres to its distribution (Fig. 2), all of them areas where agriculture and human populations are concentrated: (1) the Nefzoua, an area surrounded by sand desert on the south side of the Chott el Djerid, (2) the Dahar Mountains between the Sahara and the Mediterranean Jaffara lowlands and (3) the lowlands contiguous with the species' Algerian range, from the north side of the Chott to the south-east foothills of the Saharan Atlas. Due to the species being a commensal breeder, House Bunting is currently spreading in Tunisia, like other species that have adapted to living in close proximity to man (Luniak 1998). Such populations are often extremely fast spreading, as shown by Luniak *et al.* (1990) for Blackbird *Turdus merula*. Undoubtedly, the same applies to House Bunting, which has spread from the Atlas Mountains across all of northern Morocco within 100 years (Courtaillé & Thévenot 1988, Thévenot *et al.* 2003).

At present, a similar expansion is occurring in Tunisia, where House Bunting seems to have spread from its Saharan breeding places to Gabes in the early-20th century (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962). Whilst there have been observations in central Tunisia for some time, an expansion of the breeding range along the coast to Sfax is also now apparent. Just as in Morocco (Laferrère 1972, Giraud-Audine & Pineau 1973), the species has colonised towns, which provide favourable nesting sites, abundant food and protection from natural predators, but also shows some preference for natural, rocky breeding sites, e.g. the quarries at Feriana. Ruins are also sometimes used as nesting sites (Uhlig 1993), as a substitute for rocky habitats. Similar behaviour in the choice of nesting sites has been observed in other urban breeders, such as Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* (Schneider 1995). Further research to document what will surely prove to be an ongoing expansion of the House Bunting in Tunisia is encouraged, in order to gain more detailed information concerning the species' distribution.

Acknowledgements

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- Humboldt-University of Berlin, Department of Biology, Invalidenstrasse 43, D-10115 Berlin. E-mail: rolf.schneider@rz.hu-berlin.de*



Figure 1. Singing male House Bunting *Emberiza striolata* in the ruins of Ancient Kebili (Rolf Schneider)

Bruant striolé *Emberiza striolata*, mâle chanteur dans les ruines de l'ancienne ville de Kebili (Rolf Schneider)

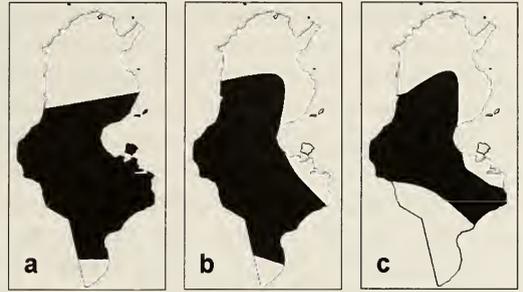


Figure 2. Distribution of House Bunting *Emberiza striolata* in Tunisia, adapted from Etchécopar & Hüe (1964), Courtaillé & Thévenot (1988) and Cramp & Perrins (1994)

Répartition du Bruant striolé *Emberiza striolata* en Tunisie, d'après Erchécopar & Hüe (1964), Courtaillé & Thévenot (1988) et Cramp & Perrins (1994)



Figure 3. Personal observations of House Buntings *Emberiza striolata* in Tunisia (black stars: 1992, white stars: 1997)

Observations du Bruant striolé *Emberiza striolata* en Tunisie par l'auteur (étoiles noires: 1992, étoiles blanches: 1997)



Figure 4. The quarries of Feriana: a rocky nesting site (Rolf Schneider)

Les carrières de Feriana: un site de nidification rocheux (Rolf Schneider)

White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* at Nazinga Game Ranch, Burkina Faso

Bruno Portier

Le Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* au Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga, Burkina Faso. La présence du Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* au Burkina Faso a été confirmée au Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga et le long du fleuve Mouhoun. De 1999 à 2002, pas moins de 52 observations totalisant 108 individus, dont au moins sept immatures, ont pu être réalisées sur le seul site de Nazinga, où l'espèce est probablement nicheuse. L'auteur passe en revue les données récoltées sur l'espèce et son habitat. Des groupes de 4, 5, 6, 10 et 12 individus ont été observés en avril-mai, période pendant laquelle le nombre d'observations était aussi le plus élevé. Ceci laisse supposer l'existence de mouvements migratoires vers le nord avant la période de nidification. Selon une estimation provisoire, le nombre de Bihoreaux à dos blanc pourrait atteindre environ 150 couples pour l'ensemble du pays.

Ornithological research, conducted at Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), Burkina Faso, from April 1999 to August 2002, produced several sur-
prises, of which confirmation of the occurrence of White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* was one of the highlights.

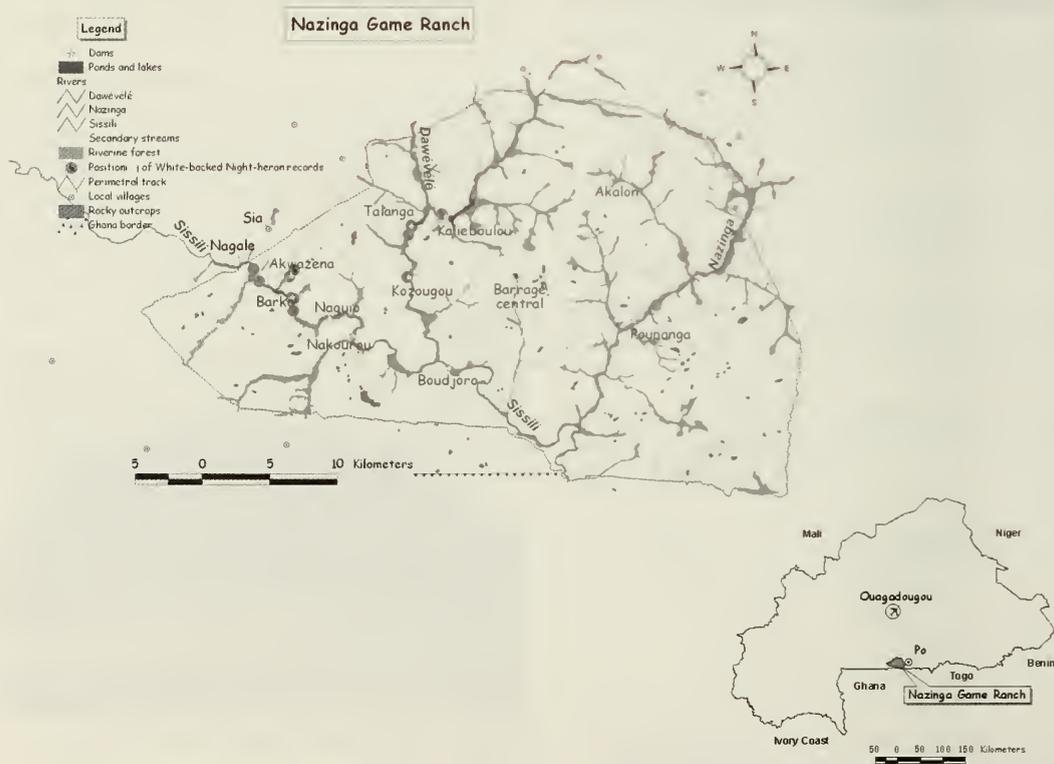


Figure 1. Location of Nazinga Game Ranch in Burkina Faso and detailed view with rivers, forest galleries (adapted from Dekker 1984) and location of White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* records.

Localisation du Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga au Burkina Faso. Réseau hydrographique et forêts galeries au sein du ranch (d'après Dekker 1984) et localisation des observations du Bihoreau à dos blanc.

This state-owned game ranch, 130 km south of Ouagadougou on the Ghanaian border (11°10'–11°18'N 01°16'–01°43'W), covers 94,300 ha of savanna, where managed safari hunting of great antelopes and buffaloes is offered together with game viewing and ecotourism activities. With near-contiguous Kaboré Tambi National Park and adjacent hunting zones, it forms Burkina's second-largest Important Bird Area (Lungren *et al.* 2001).

Nazinga lies in the Sudan sector and has an essentially southern Sudanian climate. Rainfall averages 850–1,050 mm p.a., but is strictly concentrated in the rainy season, from June to October, entailing a seven-month dry season. Temperatures are usually high, with a mean 18.1°C in January and 38.4°C in April, and abundant sunshine. The site consists mainly of plains that slope gently toward drainage channels. The south-east-flowing Sissili River, which holds water only from June to mid-October, is the main drainage through the ranch. Vegetation is typical of southern Sudan / northern Guinea savanna, and is dominated by shrub and tree savanna with *Vitellaria paradoxa* and *Combretum glutinosum*, and patches of woodland savanna with *Isoberlinia doka*, *Azelia africana* and *Anogeissus leiocarpus*, whilst riparian forest occurs along the major drainages. Dominant species of these gallery forests, which have a canopy cover of 50–75% and a height of 15–25 m, include *Daniella oliveri*, *Khaya senegalensis*, *Cacia sieberiana*, *Vitex donana*, *Dyospyros mespilliformis*, *Mitragyna inermis*, *Anogeissus leiocarpus*, *Albizia chevalieri* and *Acacia gourmaensis*. The dense shrub layer comprises *Saba senegalensis*, *Paullina pennata*, *Combretum paniculatum*, *Cola laurifolia*, *Sarcocephalus latifolius*, *Mimosa pigra* and *Mogania ferruginea*, under which grows a sparse to rare herbaceous cover with *Andropogon g. gayanus*, *Paspalum orbiculare*, *Vetiveria nigriflora* and *Andropogon macrophyllus*.

Originally, gallery forests were only present along the Sissili River and some major affluents, such as the Dawevele and Nazinga Rivers. However, since 1979, when NGR was created, 11 dams have been constructed on major streams, and these now contain water year-round, resulting in the gradual spread of gallery forests. The permanent availability of water, combined with controlled bushfires and poaching reduction efforts, has led NGR to support one of the largest African

Elephant *Loxodonta africana* populations in the region, comprising more than 600 individuals, as well as a diversity of other mammals. A total of 329 bird species has been recorded (Portier *et al.* 2002).

First records of White-backed Night Heron

On 13 September 1999, c.30 minutes after sunset, I flushed six medium-sized, stocky night herons from dense vegetation bordering Talanga dyke. Due to the poor light, no plumage details were observed, but the unfamiliar alarm calls led me to believe that these were not Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*. I reported the observation to Georges H. Oueda, who informed me that he and Martin Robinson had flushed two night herons that he presumed to be White-backed Night Herons from *Mitragyna inermis* trees at Barka dam, near the ranch headquarters, in the early morning of 11 November 1997. I thus decided to pay special attention to favourable habitats for the species, which is reputedly shy, secretive, largely nocturnal and easily overlooked (Brown *et al.* 1982, Borrow & Demey 2001), and had not yet been definitely recorded in Burkina Faso (Dowsett 1993).

On 18 February 2000, in daylight, I had good views of two adults roosting in dense riverine vegetation at Barka dam, precisely where Oueda and Robinson saw two birds in 1997. Subsequently, I encountered the species more or less regularly.

Identification

Seen well, the dark head, blackish-brown upperparts, white throat contrasting with rufous neck and breast, white belly with some inconspicuous black streaks, and large white patch around the huge dark eye, made identification fairly straightforward. The triangular white patch on the back was only seen in particular postures (Fig. 2) or occasionally in flight. White-backed Night Heron appeared stockier in flight than the slightly larger Black-crowned, with slightly shorter wings. The head was held closer to the body and the feet extended well beyond the tail (the latter often hard to see in bad light).

Identification of dull-brown immatures was trickier. Diagnostic were the darker and unstreaked forehead and crown, and the huge bulging eyes. Neck and upper breast were heavily streaked brown, upperparts speckled, wing-coverts



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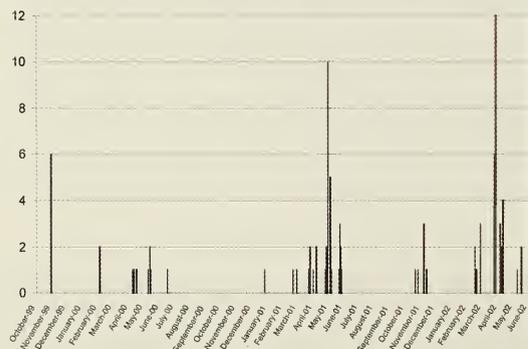
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tipped with conspicuous buffish spots, and throat and belly white (Figs. 3–4).

Behaviour

During the day, White-backed Night Herons were mainly found roosting in dense shrubbery or the lower canopy of gallery forest, at 2–15 m height. When flushed, they usually flew only a short distance and perched higher in the canopy, at *c.* 20 m, although never at the top or in an exposed position, making them difficult to re-find. They appeared very clumsy on take-off, when flushed from dense shrubs, making much more noise than Black-crowned Night Herons. This might be due to their shyness, prompting them to perch deeper in the vegetation. With experience, this became useful in detecting the species and distinguishing

it from Black-crowned Night Heron. An immature, flushed at night, became entangled in the bush from which it was trying to escape, hanging by one foot for *c.* 1 minute, head down with open wings, before it managed to free itself.

Except when flushed, White-backed Night Herons were seldom active by day. They left their roost well after dark and were generally not encountered on their feeding grounds (dams and riverbanks) less than one hour after sunset. They were apparently active all night and returned to roost in the first light of dawn, 15–30 minutes before sunrise. Black-crowned Night Herons may roost in exposed positions, e.g. on dead trees at dams, and tend to be more active during the day.

Methods for density estimates

Diurnal walks under the canopy of dense riverine forest was the best way to detect White-backed Night Herons, by flushing them. Nocturnal visits with a strong portable spotlight produced additional records of birds fishing and permitted photographs.

The first year, only sites in the conservation area (13,200 ha in the western part of the ranch, including Akwazena dam, the headquarters and the tourist campground) were visited regularly and birds were seen near the dams of Talanga, Barka and Kozougou.

In order to gain information concerning the species' density along some of Nazinga's major streams, two sections of gallery forest were surveyed: (1) 5.9 km along the Sissili River, from Nagale to Barka, and (2) 10.7 km along the Dawevele River, between Kalieboulou and Kozougou dams (see Fig. 1 for details). The survey, which consisted in walking as close as possible to dense riparian vegetation, in order to flush roosting birds, was undertaken at the start of the rainy season, on 7 and 9 June 2001, as records from the previous year suggested that birds are most easily detected during this period. The precise location of birds was noted using a GPS device. Such methodology can only produce approximate figures, as only one side of the river was surveyed and some birds may not have been flushed, especially on wider sections of river.

Results were extrapolated to the total length of suitable riparian forest within NGR. The vegetation mapping of NGR, obtained from aerial photography and field control surveys (Dekker 1984),

Captions to plate on opposite page

Figures 2–3. Adult White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*, Nazinga Game Ranch / Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* adulte, Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga (Bruno Portier)

Figures 4–5. Immature White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*, Nazinga Game Ranch / Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* immature, Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga (Bruno Portier)

Figure 6. Records of White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* at Nazinga Game Ranch, 1999–2002.

Observations du Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* à Nazinga, 1999–2002.

Table 1. Estimated suitable habitat for White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* at Nazinga Game Ranch.

Tableau 1. Estimation linéaire des portions d'habitat favorable au Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* à Nazinga.

River	Section	Length (in km)
Sissili	Nagale–Ghana border	54.0
Nazinga	Oualem–Sissili confluence	26.2
Dawevele	Koumbili–Kalieboulou	14.7
Dawevele	Natiedougou–Talanga	7.9
Dawevele	Kalieboulou–Kozougou	10.7
Dawevele	Kozougou–Sissili confluence	9.1
Total		122.7

permitted the amount of suitable habitat for the species to be fairly accurately estimated at 122.7 km (Table 1). Only major streams likely to have good-quality riverine forest were taken into account. Smaller streams may also have patches of suitable habitat, but as these are more difficult to map and unlikely to hold a large number of herons, they were not included in the estimate.

Results

From 1999 to 2002, the species was encountered on 52 occasions, totalling 108 individuals. Although most observations were of singles (31 records or 60%) two birds together (11 records, 21%) or three birds (four records, 8%), groups of 4, 5, 6 (twice), 10 and 12 birds were also encountered, mostly in dense vegetation downstream of Barka dam. Unlike as stated in some literature (e.g. Brown *et al.* 1982, Hancock & Kushlan 1984), the species thus shows, at least at some seasons, evident gregariousness. Over three consecutive years, such concentrations were observed at the end of the dry season or very early in the rainy season, in April–May. During this period the number of encounters was also highest, perhaps indicating a pre-breeding northward movement. No southward post-breeding migration was observed, however, possibly because it occurs after the rainy season and the widespread availability of water is not conducive to birds flocking at feeding grounds. The decrease of records in the middle rainy season (July–September) may be attributed

to a combination of less-intensive field work, due to the difficulty of driving muddy tracks, and birds remaining undetected in dense vegetation. The fewer records in October–February might be due to a real southbound migration to avoid the drought. However, assumptions concerning the species' seasonal occurrence in Burkina Faso are still hypothetical and more data are needed. Although very little is known concerning seasonal movements elsewhere, these are suspected in some parts of its range (Hancock & Kushlan 1984, Martínez-Vilalta & Motis 1992).

Although it was not always possible to age birds because of poor light or the brevity of the sighting, seven were positively identified as juveniles or immatures. Nests were searched for, but none was found. Breeding by the species at NGR is therefore unproven, although circumstantial evidence suggests it to be probable.

During the survey on 7 and 9 June 2001, three birds were recorded on both sections, giving an estimated density of 6 / 16.6 km = 0.36 bird/km, or 1 / 2.7 km. Considering the total of 122.7 km of suitable habitat, the potential population at Nazinga is *c.*45 birds, but the survey was based on too few data to be statistically significant.

Discussion

On the basis of the findings in Nazinga and records elsewhere in the country, a broad estimate of the species' population in Burkina Faso can be attempted. Indeed, since the discovery of the species at Nazinga, other records have come to light. The species has now also been reported along the Mouhoun River, where the first White-backed Night Heron for Burkina Faso was seen, in August 1997, at Pourra, 25 km south of Boromo (H. Van Renterghem pers. comm.). Further records along the same river include *c.*20 individuals 30–50 km north of Boromo, in July 2001, one at Boromo, on 22 December 2002, four at the Caeceadra campground, 10 km south of Boromo, in January 2003, and up to 12 in September 2003 and January 2004 (Demey 2004, F. Baillon pers. comm., H. Van Renterghem pers. comm.). Further west, at the 'Mares aux hippos', 50 km north of Bobo-Dioulasso, immatures were observed in December 2003 (one) and May 2004 (two) (F. Baillon pers. comm.).

The Mouhoun, formerly Black Volta, is the largest of the three main branches of the Volta

River that dissect Burkina Faso. Its drainage system covers half of the country with a length of c.600 km. Other large tree-lined rivers include the Comoé, in the south-west, and the Nakambe, Nazinon, Sissili and Pendjari in the Sudano-Guinean sector. Together, these rivers probably possess more than 1,500 km of gallery forests in Burkina Faso. If a moderate preliminary estimate of one pair/10 km is taken, the population of White-backed Night Herons on the Mouhoun River would be 60 pairs, and close to 150 pairs for the entire country.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Prof. W. Delvingt for his invaluable scientific support during the years spent in the field and his essential motivation without which the Nazinga project would have never been feasible. Thanks are due to G. H. Oueda, H. Van Renterghem, P. Bijlmakers and F. Baillon for providing records. Special thanks to Ron Demey for his continuous support and encouragement to write this paper. Robert J. Dowsett and Ron Demey commented on a previous draft. To learn more about Nazinga, visit the project website at: http://environnement.wallonie.be/projet_nazinga.

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17, Rue du Chêne du Bus, B-7700, Mouscron, Belgium. E-mail: brunoportier@yahoo.fr

New observations of Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia*

F. R. Roux^a and D. Otobotekere^b

Nouvelles observations de l'Astrild du Niger *Estrilda poliopareia*. L'Astrild du Niger *Estrilda poliopareia* est une espèce endémique au delta du Niger, au Nigéria, classée comme Vulnérable. Préalablement aux observations des auteurs présentées ici, il n'existait que peu de mentions documentées, la dernière datant apparemment de janvier 1987. De mars 2001 à avril 2002, les auteurs ont observé l'espèce neuf fois, en saison sèche et en saison des pluies, en 12 localités du delta (Tableau 1). Les astrilds ne se trouvaient jamais au delà d'un kilomètre d'une rivière, malgré la présence d'habitat qui semblait favorable plus à l'intérieur. Ils étaient en groupes monospécifiques ou mixtes (comprenant des Astrilds à joues oranges *E. melpoda*) comptant jusqu'à 50 individus, en couples ou solitaires. L'espèce se nourrissait de graines de plantes de milieux plus ou moins perturbés et semblait tolérer la présence humaine. Les auteurs estiment que la population compte au moins 500 individus. Pour évaluer l'impact des activités humaines sur cette population, des données supplémentaires sur sa biologie sont indispensables.

Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia* is a very local and little-known Nigerian endemic that is classified as Vulnerable, with a population estimated at just 250–1,000 birds (BirdLife International 2000, Fig. 1). Although sometimes considered a subspecies of Fawn-breasted Waxbill *E. paludicola* (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993),

it is more frequently treated as a distinct species (White 1963, Elgood *et al.* 1994, Clement *et al.* 1993, Fry & Keith 2004).

Prior to the sightings reported here, few documented records were known, the most recent apparently dating from January 1987, when two were identified at Asaba, near Onitsha (Ash 1990).

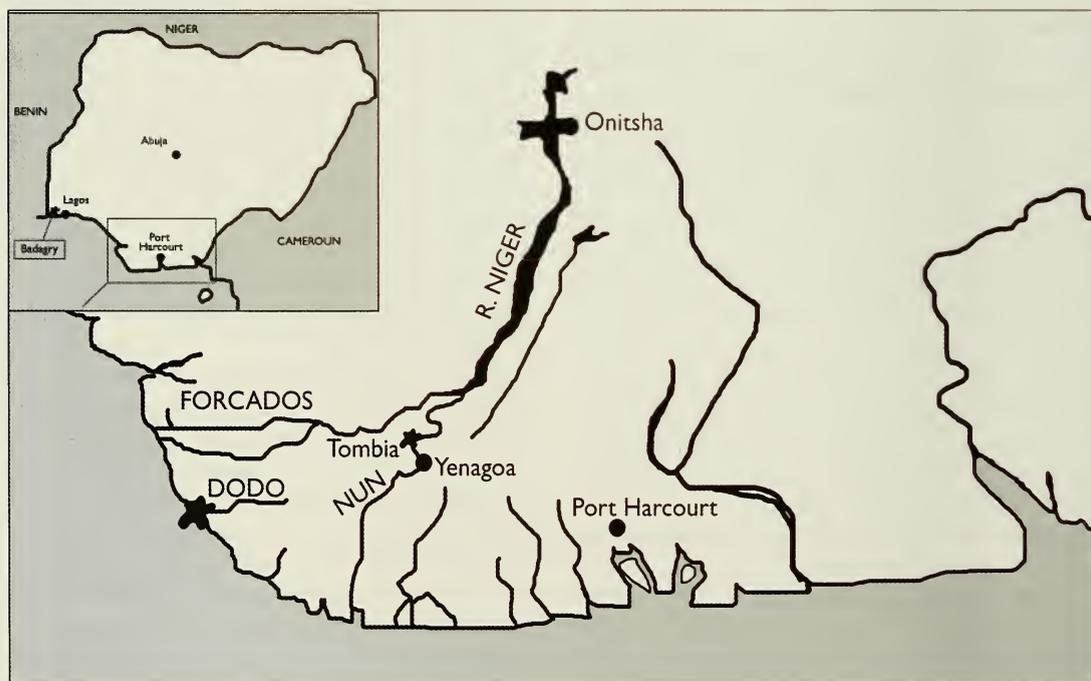


Figure 1. General distribution of Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia* in the Niger Delta and range in Nigeria. Répartition générale de l'Astrild du Niger *Estrilda poliopareia* dans le delta du Niger et aire de distribution au Nigéria

In March 1999, during the Niger Delta Environmental Survey, the species was searched for in vain by one of us along the sandbanks of the Niger River at Asaba (Roux 1999).

Observations

In the period March 2001–April 2002 we observed Anambra Waxbill on nine dates in both the dry and rainy seasons, at 12 different localities in the Niger Delta (Table 1). We first saw it on 1 March 2001, when we noted four individuals along the River Nun at Agaduma, north of Yenagoa (and c.135 km south of the 1987 record at Asaba). All sites listed in Table 1 are situated along the Nun River, in the eastern part of the Niger Delta, except for one at the Dodo River estuary (Fig. 2).

Field identification

The following features were noted:

- small estrildid, similar in size and shape to Orange-cheeked Waxbill *E. melpoda*, but slightly more heavily built;
- bright red bill (but variable, somewhat less bright in some);
- no red spot on lores;
- bright red rump;
- brown tail;
- pale buffish breast, with a faint white throat.

The absence of a red loreal spot excludes female Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*, the only possible confusion species in the area. Other observers (e.g. L. D. C. Fishpool) have sub-

sequently pointed out that the species has a pale eye.

Habitat and behaviour

The species was never encountered more than 1 km from riverbanks (and often less than 500 m away), despite the occurrence of some apparently favourable habitat further inland. It was seen feeding on the small seeds of *Kyllinga*, *Fimbristylis*, *Cerastium* (on almost bare sandbanks), *Digitaria* and *Panicum*. During our systematic search for the species in April 2002, its presence appeared to be highly correlated with the presence of these seed-bearing herbaceous plants. This explains the frequent occurrence of the birds on sandbanks in the middle of the Nun River. Weeds in yam plantations were also exploited, sometimes by large groups (of up to 30 in Agudama). According to our observations, elephant grass *Pennisetum* sp. was used for foraging only during flood periods (October–November): at this time of the year, the spikes of this very tall species (up to 3 m high) are fully developed and well above the water, while the sandbanks are covered. In Tombia, most of our observations in October–November were made in this vegetation, with birds taking young seeds and flowers.

Pennisetum may also be important as a cover under which the nest is built. We observed a bird carrying grass stems within a dense stand of *Pennisetum*, close to habitation. *Pennisetum* also provides shelter, as does cassava plantations, in

Table 1. Observations of Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia* by the authors in 2001–2002.

Tableau 1. Observations de l'Astrild du Niger *Estrilda poliopareia* par les auteurs en 2001–2002.

Date	Locality / Localité	Coordinates / Coordonnées	Number of birds / Nombre d'oiseaux
1 March 2001	Agudama		30
8 March 2001	Dodo River estuary	04°54'N 05°27'E	19
28 October 2001	Tombia	04°59'N 06°15'E	2
30 October 2001	Agudama		3+2+4+2
31 October 2001	Akaibiri (south of Tombia)		3
1 November 2001	Polaku		6+2
29 April 2002	Tombia	04°59'N 06°15'E	12+3+10
	Sabagreia		1
30 April 2002	Okopuma	05°04'N 06°16'E	1+4
	Kaiama	05°06'N 06°18'E	2+3+1+2
	Ayakoroama		1
	Between Sabagreia and Okopuma	05°04'N 06°14'E	8+1+2+1
1 May 2002	Yenagoa	04°55'N 06°16'E	10

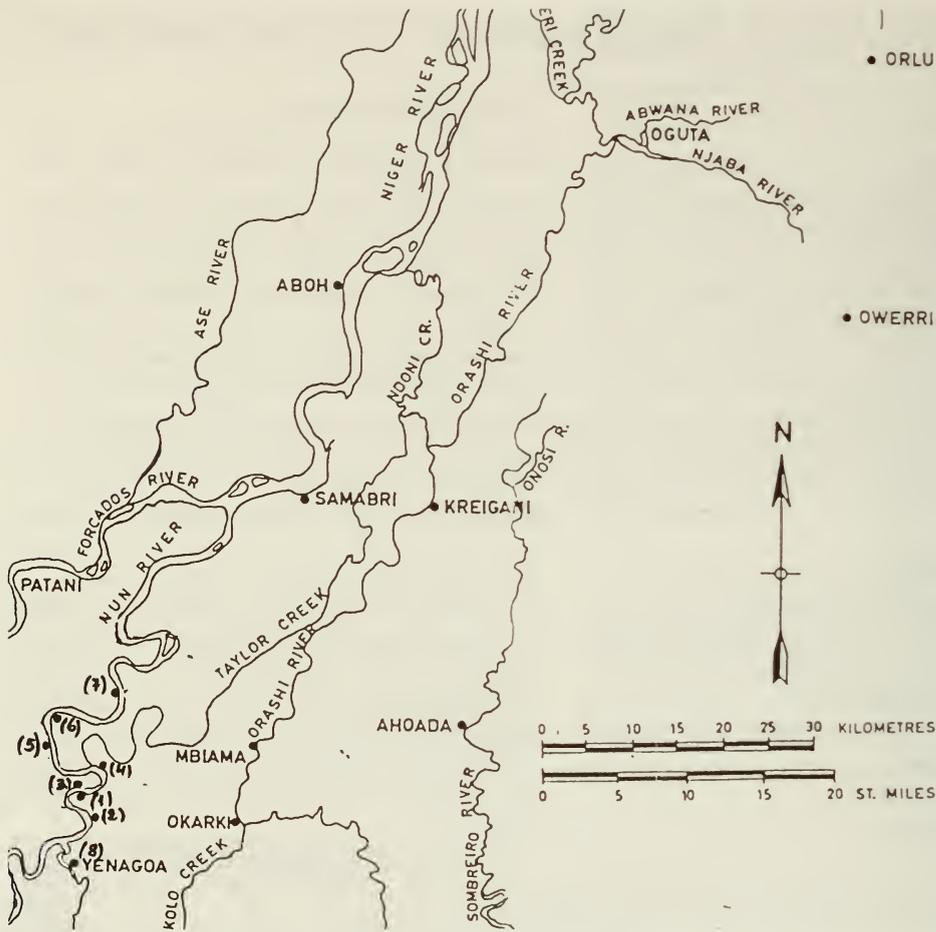


Figure 2. Observations of Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia* along the Nun River mentioned in the text: 1: Tombia (Eketiama); 2: Akaibiri; 3: Agudama; 4: Polaku; 5: Sabagreia; 6: Okopuma; 7: Kaiama. Observations de l'Astrild du Niger *Estrilda poliopareia* le long de la rivière Nun mentionnées dans le texte.

which single birds were observed on several occasions.

Approximately 50% of encounters, including those of large groups, were made close to human presence or activity: industrial fallow in Tombia, house-yards in villages along the Nun River, hospital grounds in Yenagoa, and along tarred and untarred roads in Kaiama.

The waxbills were often observed in monospecific or mixed groups (including Orange-cheeked Waxbills) of up to 50 individuals, in pairs or singly. When alone, they were easy to approach, but large groups rapidly took flight. Flights were rarely over a long distance, although some were seen crossing the Nun River, which is several hundred metres wide at this point. Although it has

been suggested that the species is likely to make short-distance movements following flooding in severe rainy seasons (BirdLife International 2000), our observations in Tombia, made at the end of October, during the peak of flooding, appear to contradict this.

We saw birds carrying nesting material on 30 April 2002, but no nest was located. A female collected in June by Serle (1957) was coming into breeding condition.

Discussion

Between 29 April 2002 and 1 May 2002, we recorded 50 Anambra Waxbills (Table 1). Most of the localities visited during these three days are sufficiently distant from each other to exclude



Figures 3–4. Anambra Waxbill / Astrild du Niger *Estrilda polioptera*, Niger Delta, Nigeria (Guus Hak)

double counts. The total number of birds recorded on 1 and 8 March 2001 was about the same.

Given that (1) many sites where the species was recorded decades ago (e.g. Forcados, Anambra Creek, Badagri) were not visited by us; (2) some of our observations appear to suggest that sandy shores at estuaries may be a favoured habitat (see records of 8 March 2002, Dodo River estuary) not previously realised; and (3) that the number of birds present at those sites that were surveyed could be higher than noted here, we estimate that we did not record more than 10% of the population. If correct, the total Anambra Waxbill population would number at least 500 birds.

As the species relies mainly on weeds of more or less disturbed habitats and does not appear to be intolerant of human presence, food availability should not be drastically reduced in case of anthropic disturbance. We therefore presume that the planned dredging of the Niger River will not be detrimental to the species. However, without precise data on its breeding biology, we are unable to evaluate the impact of human activities on the small population of the Anambra Waxbill.

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- ^aLycée français Louis Pasteur (Lagos), Consulat de France à Lagos, 128 bis rue de l'Université, 75351 Paris 07 S.P., France.
- ^bInstitute of Pollution Studies, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

The Yellow-capped Weaver *Ploceus dorsomaculatus* is not a 'nuthatch-weaver'

Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire

Le Tisserin à cape jaune *Ploceus dorsomaculatus* n'est pas un 'tisserin-sittelle'. Dans certains ouvrages le Tisserin à cape jaune *Ploceus dorsomaculatus* est mentionné comme appartenant à la guildes des 'tisserins-sittelles', au même titre que son espèce jumelle le Tisserin de Preuss *P. preussi*. Cette note, basée sur des observations extensives au Congo-Brazzaville et au Cameroun, montre que ce n'est pas le cas. Alors que *P. preussi* se nourrit essentiellement en prospectant l'écorce des troncs et grosses branches, *P. dorsomaculatus* fouille les feuillages des grands arbres à la manière d'une grosse fauvette, et se nourrit également comme un gobemouche *Muscicapa*. Cette différence fondamentale de techniques de nourrissage explique sans doute que ces deux espèces jumelles peuvent coexister dans le même type de forêt dans une vaste région, allant du Gabon et du Cameroun jusqu'au Congo-Kinshasa.

The Yellow-capped Weaver *Ploceus dorsomaculatus* is a scarce forest resident known from a small number of localities in southern Cameroon, north-east Gabon, northern Congo-Brazzaville, southern Central African Republic (C.A.R.) and eastern Congo-Kinshasa (ex-Zaire). The distribution details given by Craig (*in* Fry & Keith 2004) contain a few errors: the only locality cited for Congo-Brazzaville is Berberati, which is in fact in C.A.R. The species was first observed in northern Congo-Brazzaville in 1994, in Odzala National Park, and reported once from Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998). Additional localities overlooked by Craig are Lobéké in south-east Cameroon (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000a) and Minkébé in northern Gabon (Christy 2001). Lobaye in C.A.R. (included by Craig) was rejected by Germain (1992) and the only localities acceptable for C.A.R. are Berberati (Stone 1936) and Ngotto (Christy 1995).

Preuss's Golden-backed Weaver *P. preussi* is very similar in plumage (Borrow & Demey 2001) and overlaps with *P. dorsomaculatus* from Cameroon and Gabon to eastern Congo-Kinshasa, but has a wider range, reaching Guinea in West Africa. It is generally considered to be more common, and has also a wider altitudinal range. *P. dorsomaculatus* does not penetrate montane forest *sensu stricto*: it is restricted to lowland forest in Central Africa and is not recorded with any certainty above 1,500 m in eastern Congo-Kinshasa (Chapin 1954, Prigogine 1971). The

altitude of 1,800 m mentioned by Craig apparently comes from a sight record in Kivu by Lippens & Wille (1976) and is best considered unconfirmed (especially as the feeding behaviour recorded suggests *P. preussi* rather than *P. dorsomaculatus*). *P. preussi*, on the other hand, reaches the montane zone in Cameroon north of the Sanaga: it is recorded from several massifs including Bakossi, Kupe and the Bamenda Highlands, up to c.2,000 m (it has been seen several times at Bafut-Ngamba near Bamenda at an altitude of 2,000 m, including by myself, R. J. Dowsett, M. Andrews and others in April 1997). *P. preussi* is unquestionably a nuthatch-weaver, foraging by probing the bark of trunks and larger branches (Chapin 1954, Brosset & Erard 1986, Dowsett-Lemaire 1997 and pers. obs.). The biology of *P. dorsomaculatus* remains poorly known: the voice is unknown and the nest was undescribed until recently, when N. Borrow (pers. comm.) found one near Makokou in Gabon on 21 August 2001 (the source is erroneously given as 'Borrow & Demey 2001' in Craig). Very little has been published on its feeding behaviour. Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett (1998) briefly mention that the species is distinguished from *P. preussi* not only by plumage details but also by its feeding ecology, 'exploring the foliage and not the bark for insects'. This distinction is correctly stressed in Borrow & Demey (2001). Similarly, Brosset & Erard (1986), who studied the forest avifauna of northern Gabon over a period of 20 years, noted: 'exploitant les feuillages des houppiers des arbres...vu exploitant

les essaimages de termites'—the latter sentence implying that it may also feed by flycatching.

Yet *P. dorsomaculatus* has been qualified in some handbooks (e.g. Hall & Moreau 1970, Craig *in* Fry & Keith 2004) as being part of the assemblage of 'nuthatch-weavers'. Hall & Moreau (p. 292) write of *P. dorsomaculatus*, *P. preussi* and others: 'all are alike in the way they crawl about on branches and trunks of trees searching for insects, more like nuthatches than weavers.' Craig (*in* Fry & Keith 2004) adds 'very like *P. preussi* in appearance and behaviour'. The early collectors (e.g. Bates 1909, 1911) did not as a rule record the feeding behaviour of *P. dorsomaculatus*. Chapin (1954) came across the species only once, when he collected a pair 'climbing about the larger limbs of some great trees in a clearing'. This apparently served to justify the label of 'nuthatch-weaver' in subsequent works. Yet, as the birds were collected they may not have been observed for long enough to be certain of Chapin's statement. My own observations in Congo and Cameroon concur with those of Brosset & Erard (1986) and indicate that the feeding behaviour of *P. dorsomaculatus* is radically different from that of *P. preussi*.

In Gabon (Brosset & Erard 1986), Congo and Cameroon (pers. obs.) both *P. preussi* and *P. dorsomaculatus* occur in the open canopy of semi-evergreen forest or of old secondary forest. I first came across *P. dorsomaculatus* in primary semi-evergreen forest in Odzala National Park in January 1994. A single male (with golden crown) flew into the canopy of a 50-m-tall *Piptadeniastrum africanum* (Mimosaceae) with a group of Dusky Tits *Parus funereus* and a pair of Western Black-headed Orioles *Oriolus brachyrhynchus*. This bird spent the 40 minutes it was watched searching the thin, feather-like foliage of the outer canopy. It occasionally fed upside-down, inspecting the under-surface of leaflets, but was never seen probing bark. I saw it again the same week (presumably the same bird) in the same forest, this time with a much larger mixed-species flock including Cassin's Malimbos *Malimbus cassini* and Yellow-mantled Weavers *Ploceus tricolor*. It again fed like a large warbler in the foliage of tall trees. Later that month, I watched a pair in another forest at Odzala, in a huge canopy party including *Andropadus* bulbuls, several sunbirds, malimbos, Western Black-headed Orioles etc. The pair fed in tall trees then flew to a medium-sized *Musanga*

cecropioides, searching the base of the large compound leaves for insects.

My next encounter with *P. dorsomaculatus* was in Lobéké Faunal Reserve (now a National Park) in south-east Cameroon in April 1997 (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000a). R. J. Dowsett and I were camped on the Lobéké stream for a week, in an area of open-canopy, semi-evergreen forest—dominant tall trees being *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, *Pterygota macrocarpa*, *Ceiba pentandra* and *Terminalia superba*. A single female (with black cap) had her quarters in a number of large trees next to our tent, and a pair was seen once c.1 km further away. The female was seen each day, occasionally feeding alone, but more frequently with other species, including the local pair of Forest Wood-hoopoes *Phoeniculus castaneiceps*, Western Black-headed Oriole, *Andropadus* bulbuls, various sunbirds, Tit-hylia *Pholidornis rufiae*, three apalis warblers *Apalis* spp., Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps*, Fernando Po Batis *Batis poensis*, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher *Erythrocerus mccallii*, and Cassin's Malimbe. The female either fed in the foliage in the usual agile manner (sometimes upside-down) or by flycatching. This was most frequently performed from the crown of an almost bare tree (in leaf-bud), in circular loops returning to the same perch or another perch in the same tree. A pair of *P. preussi* was seen several times in the vicinity and once in the same tree: the two weaver species were some distance apart as *P. preussi* fed exclusively on the bark of the trunk and large branches, and was closely associated with a pair of Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis*, which is also a typical bark-gleaning specialist. This close association between *P. preussi* and *M. rubricollis* has been observed elsewhere too, as in Nouabale-Ndoki (Congo) and other forest sites in Cameroon.

In all, I have watched both *P. preussi* and *P. dorsomaculatus* sufficiently closely and frequently to be confident that their feeding ecologies are very different. N. Borrow (pers. comm.), who has seen both species in Gabon on several occasions, is in complete agreement with this conclusion. Given the similarity of plumage, range and habitat, these two sibling species obviously manage to coexist by using different feeding techniques. In a limited part of their range, they may come across Brown-capped Weaver *Ploceus insignis*, a montane species with occasional vagrants or isolated populations at

medium altitudes (cf. Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1996): thus all three were seen once in the same party at M'Passa in Gabon, *P. insignis* being a mere vagrant there (Brosset & Erard 1986). But *P. insignis* being a bark-feeding specialist like *P. preussi*, the problem of coexistence is between these two species, rather than with *P. dorsomaculatus*. At Bafut-Ngemba near Bamenda, we observed *P. preussi* and *P. insignis* feed in the same tree, in an area where extensive forest destruction had reduced available habitat to a tiny fragment. Conditions of the coexistence of *P. preussi* and *P. insignis* elsewhere in their montane range in Cameroon need investigating. In the Bakossi Mts, at least, they both appear rather rare and were not observed together (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000b); on Mt Kupe the status of *P. insignis* (reported only twice) is uncertain and *P. preussi* is at best uncommon (Bowden 2001).

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- Le Pouget, 30440 Sumène, France. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com*

New records of weavers using man-made structures for nesting

H. Dieter Oschadleus

Nouvelles mentions de tisserins utilisant des constructions artificielles pour nicher. Les nids de tisserins sont d'habitude suspendus à des arbres ou des roseaux. L'auteur rapporte la nidification de Tisserins du Cap *Ploceus capensis* dans des nids suspendus à des constructions artificielles: (a) le toit d'une grange et (b) les caillebotis de champs d'épandage. Les deux colonies comportaient des nids occupés. Les nids de trois colonies de Tisserins écarlates *Anaplectes rubriceps* étaient suspendus à des poutres supportant des toits de chaume. Un de ces nids était occupé par un couple d'Amadines cou-coupé *Amadina fasciata*. Des photos sont présentées de Tisserins intermédiaires *Ploceus intermedius* nichant dans des nids suspendus au bord d'un toit de chaume. De nombreux nids étaient suspendus les uns en dessous des autres. Le fait que les Tisserins écarlates et intermédiaires suspendent parfois leurs nids à des toits de chaume avait été signalé auparavant. L'utilisation de constructions artificielles pour y suspendre des nids a également été rapportée chez d'autres espèces de tisserins, telles que le Républicain social *Philetairus socius*, le Tisserin à tête rousse *Ploceus velatus* et le Tisserin gendarme *P. cucullatus*, mais ces observations doivent être considérées comme exceptionnelles. La mention concernant un Sporopipe squameux *Sporopipes squamifrons* semble être erronée. L'utilisation de constructions artificielles pour la nidification pourrait réduire le risque de prédation et, dans certains cas, fournir un meilleur abri aux oeufs et aux jeunes.

Building nests close to habitation is well known for some weaver species and is considered a measure to reduce predation by wild animals, birds and reptiles (Collias & Collias 1964). Several weaver species breed on man-made structures, especially telephone wires and poles, fences and windmills (Fry & Keith 2004), although these sites are usually far from habitation, and are not reviewed here. A few species have been recorded to build their nests on structures inhabited or used by humans (Table 1). Here I report the first records of Cape Weavers *Ploceus capensis* breeding inside a building and under a service walkway. I also report unpublished records of Red-headed Weavers *Anaplectes rubriceps* and Lesser Masked Weavers *Ploceus intermedius* suspending their nests from buildings, although these two species have previously been recorded to exhibit such behaviour (Table 1). The records presented here are of active breeding nests.

Cape Weavers breeding under roof of farm shed

On 19 November 2003 I was ringing with a group on Malkopbaai farm (32°08'S 18°18'E) at Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, South Africa. We worked in the large farm shed containing farm

equipment. The shed was open at the front and had an open doorway at the back, permitting easy access for sparrows and weavers. I noticed 31 Cape Weaver nests suspended from the wooden beams supporting the roof of the shed. Most nests were attached wherever wire or plastic strands looped around the beams (Fig. 1), and two were hanging from other nests. Many nests were untidy, suggesting that they may have been built by immature males (Elliott 1973). Two were breeding nests.

Nest A contained two large chicks, which were ringed. Nest B had three smaller chicks, which were too small to be ringed. The nests were observed from 07.45 to 11.30 hrs. Hanging from the nest (Fig. 2), the female of nest A fed the chicks 24 times in 3 hrs 45 minutes, i.e. 6.4 feeds per hour; as the chicks would call on these occasions, feeding events were unlikely to be overlooked. The chicks of nest B were quiet, and the female usually flew quickly into the nest to feed and brood them, thus no accurate feeding rate could be established. A single adult male that often perched on a nearby girder or rope (Fig. 1) was the apparent owner of these two nests.

On 21 November we returned to ring at the same site. Nest A was observed from 06.12 to 11.34 hrs, during which time there were 40 feeds,

i.e. 7.4 per hour. The female of nest B was observed visiting at least 14 times in the same period, but again many visits may have been missed.

These feeding rates lie within the range of 3.7–22.2 feeds/hour at Cape Weaver nests (n=375) recorded by Elliott (1973) in trees and reeds in the Western Cape.

Cape Weavers breeding under service walkway

On 28 October 2001 I visited Strandfontein sewage works, Cape Town (34°04'S 18°31'E), South Africa, where Cape Weaver nests were suspended from the latticed service walkways running to the centre of each pond, 1–2 m above the sludge (Figs. 3–4). The attachments of each nest were on several sections of the lattice grids (Fig. 5). There were 1–10 nests per pond, with a total of 31 nests at eight ponds. A year later I counted eight nests on 12 October 2002 and 20 on 4 November. There were five active nests in 2001 and at least two in 2002 (determined by watching females flying to and from their nests to incubate or feed

chicks). In 2001 there had been one male per pond, except at pond 'CS' where there were two. One male, colour-ringed at colony 'AS', was found to have eight nests. In 2002 the same individual was observed at colony 'CS' with a single nest, whilst there were no nests at 'AS'.

Of the six Cape Weavers that were colour-ringed at Strandfontein in November 2001, one was resighted near the main centre complex, adjacent to the ponds, on 14 July 2002 (B. Trevis pers. comm.). This indicates that the bird wintered at Strandfontein, although Cape Weavers may move widely over the Cape Peninsula.

Red-headed Weaver's nests suspended from roofs

On 26 October 1997, three colonies of Red-headed Weavers were found at Robert's Ranch (25°25'S 27°45'E), near Brits, Northwest Province, South Africa.

Colony A was situated behind the main farmhouse, where the nests were suspended from the beams supporting the thatched roof (Fig. 6). The

Table 1. Records of weaver nests built on structures inhabited or used by humans.

Tableau 1. Observations de nids de tisserins suspendus à des structures habitées ou utilisées par l'Homme.

Species	Nest site	Location	Reference
Sociable Weaver <i>Philetairus socius</i>	supporting beams under roof of lean-to shed	Brandvlei-Vanwyksvlei, Northern Cape, South Africa	Brooke & Harrison 1992
Red-headed Weaver <i>Anaplectes rubriceps</i>	inside buildings	East Africa	Britton 1980
	beam of thatched roof of veranda	Njakwa, Malawi	Benson 1953
	beams supporting thatched roof of farmhouse	Robert's Ranch, North-west Province, South Africa	this study
Cape Weaver <i>Ploceus capensis</i>	support beams of roof of large farm shed	Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, South Africa	this study
	service walkway	Strandfontein, Western Cape, South Africa	this study
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>P. intermedius</i>	thatch above door; under eaves of hut	Mkuzi Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa	Jay 1994
	creeper under roof eaves of mine offices	Messina, Limpopo Province, South Africa	Tarboton 1965
	under eaves of buildings	Shingwedzi, Kruger National Park, South Africa	this study
Southern Masked Weaver <i>P. velatus</i>	on creepers of veranda	Waddilove Institution, Zimbabwe	Priest 1936
Village Weaver <i>P. cucullatus</i>	netting wire under hotel eaves	Beit Bridge, Limpopo Province, South Africa	Redd 1962
Baya Weaver <i>P. philippinus</i>	palm-leaf thatching of tenanted village huts	India	Ali & Ripley 1974
	verandas of houses	Burma	Smythies 1940

colony contained nine nests, most hanging directly from the roof, with some suspended below other nests. One nest contained chicks, which were being fed by an adult female. An old nest had been commandeered by Cut-throat Finches *Amadina fasciata*, with finch chicks present in the nest. The other nests were empty, probably having been built in previous seasons. On the next visit, on 21 November, both weaver and finch chicks had apparently fledged, but there was one new nest, in which a female Red-headed Weaver was incubating one egg. On 23 November the female was incubating three eggs. Two days later, the female was absent and a pair of Cut-throat Finches flew out of the nest, which was found to contain three cold weaver eggs. The reason for the desertion by the weavers is unknown.

In Colony B two nests were hanging from the beams supporting the thatched roof of an office near the main farmhouse. One nest was old and empty, whilst the other contained chicks. In November the colony was visited again but there was no activity: the chicks had probably fledged and no new nests had been built. Colony C was several kilometres away in a disused restaurant, with three deserted nests hanging from the beams supporting the thatched roof. On 23 and 25 November a male was present, but there were no active nests.

These are the first published records of Red-headed Weavers suspending their nest from buildings in southern Africa, although there are records from Malawi and East Africa (Table 1). These observations suggest that nesting on man-made structures may be a widespread habit of this species in certain parts of Africa.

Lesser Masked Weaver's nests suspended from roof

I was given two photographs, taken in early February 1997, of Lesser Masked Weavers breeding in nests suspended from the edge of the thatched roof of a building at Shingwedzi campsite (23°06'S 31°26'E), northern Kruger National Park, South Africa (Figs. 7–8). The nests were probably attached to the wire that held the thatch onto the wooden beams. Many were suspended below each other. There were also nests in a nearby tree. Records of these weavers using buildings for nesting have been published previously (Table 1).

Discussion

Cape Weavers usually suspend their nests from trees and reeds (Fry & Keith 2004). Man-made sites include fences (Tarboton 2001) and telephone wires (Skead 1995). To reduce predation risk, they may be attached to thin twigs over water (Moreau 1942, Craig 1995). The domed nest also protects its contents from rain, sun and, to some extent, wind (Collias & Collias 1964, Oschadleus 1995). Attaching nests under a roof or to the service walkway as described above, would provide additional shelter, especially from wind, and probably also offer protection from avian predators. Cape Weavers usually breed in multi-male colonies (Fry & Keith 2004). Only one male was present at the farm shed, whilst at the sewage ponds the males were spread out over a larger area than is usual for a colony (pers. obs.). Thus man-made sites may limit colony size, but do provide new sites to be used.

Red-headed Weavers usually build their nests high in tall trees, except when attaching them to telephone wires or buildings. At Robert's Ranch, *Acacia* and other trees provided natural sites near the farmhouse, but these were not used.

With the records of Cape Weaver reported above, seven weaver species are now known to build their nests on structures inhabited or used by humans (Table 1). Several records exist for Lesser Masked Weaver, Red-headed Weaver and Asian Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (Ali & Ripley 1974, Smythies 1940). The single records for Cape Weaver, Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius*, Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* and Village Weaver *P. cucullatus* can be considered as irregular or unusual occurrences. Winterbottom (1971) mentioned a record of Scaly-fronted Weaver *Sporopipes squamifrons* nesting under the eaves of houses, but this seems to be an error: Winterbottom (1971) is a revision of Priest's (1948) work, but the latter only reported a 'single thorn tree' as the nesting site for this species. Winterbottom presumably realised this error, as he omits mention of this unusual nest site in his subsequent extensive writings.

In all these documented cases, buildings are possibly used to reduce predation risk and provide additional shelter for eggs and chicks.



Figure 1. Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* nests suspended from beams of a farm shed, Malkopbaai farm, Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, South Africa; male perched on hanging rope (Dieter Oschadleus)

Nids de Tisserins du Cap *Ploceus capensis* suspendus à des poutres d'une grange, ferme de Malkopbaai, Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, Afrique du Sud; mâle accroché à une corde suspendue (Dieter Oschadleus)



Figure 2. Female Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* feeding chicks in nest A, Malkopbaai farm, Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, South Africa (Dieter Oschadleus)

Tisserin du Cap *Ploceus capensis* femelle nourrissant les jeunes du nid A, ferme de Malkopbaai, Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, Afrique du Sud (Dieter Oschadleus)



Figure 3. Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* nests suspended from the service walkway over a pond at Strandfontein Sewage Works, Western Cape, South Africa; nests indicated by arrows (Dieter Oschadleus)

Nids de Tisserins du Cap *Ploceus capensis* suspendus au caillebotis surplombant une mare à Strandfontein, Western Cape, Afrique du Sud; les nids sont indiqués par des flèches (Dieter Oschadleus)



Figure 4. Male Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* hanging from a new nest and female feeding chicks at a colony under a service walkway at Strandfontein Sewage Works, Western Cape, South Africa (Dieter Oschadleus)

Tisserin du Cap *Ploceus capensis* mâle accroché à un nouveau nid et femelle nourrissant des jeunes dans une colonie sous un caillebotis d'un champ d'épandage à Strandfontein, Western Cape, Afrique du Sud (Dieter Oschadleus)



Figure 5. Attachment of Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* nests to a service walkway at Strandfontein Sewage Works, Western Cape, South Africa (Dieter Oschadleus)

Nids de Tisserins du Cap *Ploceus capensis* accrochés à un caillebotis d'un champ d'épandage à Strandfontein, Western Cape, Afrique du Sud (Dieter Oschadleus)



Figure 6. Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps* nests suspended from the beams supporting the thatched roof of a farmhouse at Robert's Ranch, Northwest Province, South Africa (Dieter Oschadleus)

Nids de Tisserins écarlates *Anaplectes rubriceps* suspendus à des poutres supportant un toit de chaume à Robert's Ranch, Northwest Province, Afrique du Sud (Dieter Oschadleus)

Figures 7–8. Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius* nests suspended from the edge of the thatched roof of a building at Shingwedzi campsite, Kruger National Park, South Africa (Billy Noble)

Nids de Tisserins intermédiaires *Ploceus intermedius* suspendus au bord d'un toit de chaume au campement de Shingwedzi, Parc national Kruger, Afrique du Sud (Billy Noble)

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The hybrid population of Pied Crow *Corvus albus* and Somali Crow *C. edithae* on Dahlak Kebir Island, Eritrea: a case of assortative mating?

Tiziano Londei

Une population hybride du Corbeau pie *Corvus albus* et du Corbeau d'Edith *C. edithae* sur l'île Dahlak Kebir, Eritrée: un cas d'accouplements entre oiseaux du même type? A l'intérieur de la zone hybride du Corbeau pie *Corvus albus* et du Corbeau d'Edith *C. edithae*, l'île Dahlak Kebir héberge des oiseaux nicheurs de coloration intermédiaire qui peuvent être distingués selon les types 'Corbeau pie' ou 'Corbeau d'Edith'. Des observations limitées semblent indiquer que les couples étaient constitués d'oiseaux du même type plutôt que d'oiseaux de types différents et que les oiseaux du type 'Corbeau d'Edith', moins nombreux, restaient souvent sans partenaire. Etant donné que toute autre barrière est improbable sur cette île aride plate, l'action d'éviter le type différent semble limiter l'hybridation.

Hybrid zones between populations of appreciably different, but closely related, birds are of considerable interest in efforts to understand species evolution. There is, however the taxonomic problem of whether to consider the hybridising forms subspecies, should they interbreed, or species, when hybridisation is limited (Newton 2003). That hybrids are rare in the wild suggests the existence of strong species-recognition mechanisms, ensuring that birds normally pair only with individuals of their own species. These isolating mechanisms would clearly be adaptive as far as they prevented the production of unviable, infertile or otherwise unfit hybrids between true species. However, there is no reason why the same mechanisms should not act at subspecific levels, provided that individuals detected sufficient difference from their 'species' model. Such mechanism would result in assortative mating within the species. A crow hybrid zone is well known for Europe, where Carrion Crow *Corvus (corone) corone* and Hooded Crow *C. (corone) cornix* meet. Rather extensive studies have not yet elucidated

why this hybrid zone is persistently narrow, despite hybrid fertility (for a review, see Parkin *et al.* 2003). Whilst ecological differences between the pure forms, with reduced fitness of the hybrids outside the hybrid zone, has appeared to be the principal reason (Saino & Villa 1992), avoidance of the different bird type has also been suggested, to explain an observed tendency to form pairs and flocks of similarly coloured birds within the hybrid zone (Rolando & Laiolo 1994). The tendency to form pairs of the same type among Carrion and Hooded Crows inhabiting Amrum, a Frisian flat islet, has cast some doubt as to the importance of ecological separation (Risch & Andersen 1998).

Formerly called Dwarf Raven, and considered a smaller subspecies of Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* or even Northern Raven *C. corax*, Somali Crow *C. edithae* has been subsequently recognised as a closer relative of Pied Crow *C. albus* (North 1962, Londei 1995). Somali Crow differs from Brown-necked Raven in shape, voice and behaviour, and the latter's bill is less arched,

Table 1. Pied-type and Somali-type crows, paired or unpaired, counted at two localities on Dahlak Kebir

Tableau 1. Oiseaux des types 'Corbeau pie' et 'Corbeau d'Edith', en couples ou solitaires, comptés en deux localités de l'île Dahlak Kebir

	Pied With Pied	Somali With Somali	Unpaired	With Somali	With Pied	Unpaired
Luul (1st count)	14	1	5	2	1	2
Luul (2nd count)	10	2	3	2	2	3
Afar village	10	0	5	0	0	2

more dagger-like, which is easily noticed on photographs (pers. obs.). Whilst Pied Crow is widespread over most of sub-Saharan Africa, Somali Crow is restricted to the Horn of Africa. Here their ranges marginally overlap and hybrids occur (Ash 1983, Ash & Miskell 1998, Urban 2000). Concerning the Arussi plateau, in Ethiopia, Blair (1961) noted, 'within the critical area mixed flocks are common, but pure flocks would nevertheless be commoner'. Pied and Somali Crows are very similar to each other in size, shape, voice and behaviour, but they noticeably differ in coloration, Pied Crow being black and white and Somali Crow all black. In a previous paper (Londei 1995) I suggested that, although they seemed to differ in ecology (Wilson 1990), this might simply reflect the degree of their geographical separation. Thus it would be interesting to assess the degree of their hybridisation where any ecological difference was unlikely. Just off the Eritrean coast, the island of

Dahlak Kebir stretches more than 50 km and consists of a limestone shelf only a few metres above sea level. A resident, interbreeding population of Pied and Somali Crows has been present since at least Zedlitz's (1911) record of variously 'melanistic' Pied Crows together with 'normal' ones (birds observed and collected in 1909). As usual with Pied and Somali Crows, these crows keep close to settlements, which are few on this barren island (pers. obs.).

I was on Dahlak Kebir between 24 and 27 February 2004, when nest building had commenced and birds kept close to their mates when moving around the island. Having found too few nests to make any estimate of interbreeding from the pairs nearby, I looked at birds in transit between different areas of the island. I chose suitable places and times when most birds would be flying in the same direction, and used short observation periods (c.15 minutes) to avoid double



Figure 1. Pied-type (right) and Somali-type crows paired, a less frequent sight. Hybrid traits are evident in both. Luul Resort, Dahlak Kebir Island, Eritrea, 26 February 2004 (Tiziano Londei)

Un couple mixte des types 'Corbeau pie' (à droite) et 'Corbeau d'Edith', un cas peu fréquent. Les traits hybrides sont apparents chez les deux oiseaux. Luul Resort, Île Dahlak Kebir, Eritrée, 26 février 2004 (Tiziano Londei)

counts. Reliable counts were obtained twice (on different days) near Luul Resort, where crows flew in the direction of a military base, and once near a settlement of Afar pastoralists, 14 km to the south-east, with crows moving towards the village. Although some birds appeared to be pure Pied or Somali Crows, most showed intergrading coloration, but true intermediates were rare. Thus, I considered all birds as being either Pied-type or Somali-type (Fig. 1), the distinguishing criterion being the presence or absence of white on the hindneck, i.e. a complete white collar. The existence of several crow species with a pale collar and appropriate behaviour used in displaying this feature (pers. obs. for Pied and Hooded Crows) suggests that this is an important trait for species recognition. I counted Pied-type and Somali-type birds moving in pairs, as well as isolated birds, which I assumed to be unpaired.

Although too few for reliable statistical analysis, the data from the three counts (Table 1) consistently suggest that (1) pairs of the same type were more frequent than expected from the relative abundance of that type (Pied being *c.*4 times commoner than Somali), and pairs of different types, less; and (2) the less-abundant, Somali-type birds were more frequently unpaired. Such results are best explained by assortative mating. The Pied or Somali type, or both, would prefer to form pairs with birds of the same type. Given the less frequent occurrence of the Somali-type in the mixed population, birds of this type would less frequently meet with each other and thus they would more often remain unpaired. The reverse might occur in areas where Pied was in the minority (the other side of the hybrid zone), thus keeping the hybrid zone stable. As on the island of Amrum, in the case of Carrion and Hooded Crows (Risch & Andersen 1998), my data from Dahlak Kebir suggest a stable hybrid zone with no problems, either for the hybrids or the parental forms, in terms of fitness. However, assortative mating would limit the hybridisation itself.

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Dipartimento di Biologia, Universita degli Studi, Via Celoria 26, 20133 Milano, Italy. E-mail: londeit@tin.it

First record of Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* for Seychelles

John and Viv Phillips

Première mention de l'Alouette monticole *Melanocorypha bimaculata* pour les Seychelles. Une Alouette monticole *Melanocorypha bimaculata* était présente à Bird Island du 22 au 27 novembre 2003. Cette mention, qui a été acceptée par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois comme la première pour le pays, semble également constituer la première donnée d'un oiseau d'origine sauvage au sud de l'équateur.

From 20 to 24 November 2003 we visited Bird Island (03°43'S 55°13'E), the northernmost of the Seychelles, which is gaining a reputation as a good site for migrant and vagrant birds. The island lived up to expectations, as within 24 hours of arriving we had seen a number of Palearctic–African migrants, including a Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, five Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis*, c.20 Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, two White Wagtails *Motacilla alba* and a Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*.

On 22 November at c.12.00 hrs we were watching a Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* in an area of sandy scrub in the north of the island, when a large lark alighted at close range and commenced feeding. We spent the next ten minutes watching it through binoculars, before hurrying to the hotel to make notes and collect a telescope. Subsequently we had excellent views for nearly an hour. The bird was very tame and fed continuously. The heavy bill, conspicuous black patch extending across the breast, and dark underwing, pointed to Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*, Calandra Lark *M. calandra* or possibly an African species with which we were unfamiliar. Although the range of field guides available to us was rather limited, we concluded that the wing and tail pattern indicated Bimaculated Lark rather than Calandra.

On 23 November the bird was also seen by Robbie Bresson, a local birdwatcher, and it was still present on 24th, when we returned to Mahé. Here, we consulted a range of field guides and other literature, and were able to confirm the identification as Bimaculated Lark. We returned to Bird Island with Adrian Skerrett on 27th and found the bird still present in the same area.

However, it was much less tame, to the extent that AS was unable to photograph it. We could not find it on 28th, and it was not seen subsequently.

Description

A large, attractive and brightly plumaged lark, with distinct chestnut tones to the face and bright orangey-buff tips to the greater coverts. Head markings rather complex, with a broad and conspicuous whitish supercilium, a blackish loreal stripe, and a dark line extending back from the base of the lower mandible outlining a creamy-white lower eye-ring. Ear-coverts rather plain chestnut, surrounded by thin dark lines. Heavy black breast-band broadest on upper-breast-sides. Rectrices tipped white, except central pair. No white trailing edge to the wing in flight. Underwing dark grey rather than blackish.

Although geographical variation between Bimaculated Lark populations is slight and sometimes considered insufficient to warrant subspecific separation (e.g. Alström 2004), three races are usually accepted. In view of the bright plumage tones, we tentatively concluded that the bird was of the race *rufescens*, which breeds in central and southern Turkey, northern Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, rather than the greyer nominate race from northern Turkey and southern Transcaucasia (Cramp 1988, Snow & Perrins 1998). A third race, *torquata*, in north-east Iran and Turkmeniya eastwards, is even paler and greyer than the nominate, and winters in Iran, Pakistan and India (Cramp 1988). Birds of the two western races migrate through Egypt to winter mainly in Sudan and Eritrea (Urban & Brown 1971, Moreau 1972, Nikolaus 1987, Goodman & Meininger 1989, Keith *et al.* 1992).

The record has been accepted by the Seychelles Bird Records Committee as the first for Seychelles. It would also appear to be the first south of the equator, a specimen from Swakopmund, Namibia, collected on 26 September 1930, being considered to refer to an escaped cagebird (Brooke 1988).

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Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* breeding in Cairo, Egypt

Alexander (Sandy) L. Darling

Le Hibou moyen-duc *Asio otus* nichant au Caire, Egypte. Depuis le début des années 1990, des observations répétées de jeunes Hiboux moyen-duc *Asio otus* indiquent que cette espèce doit être ajoutée à la liste des espèces nicheuses en Egypte. Toutes les observations proviennent du delta du Nil et, surtout, du Caire, où des adultes et des juvéniles ont été observés régulièrement au Gezira Club. Ces observations confirment que l'espèce niche, bien qu'aucun nid n'ait encore été trouvé.

Goodman & Meininger (1989) reported Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* as a 'winter visitor in small numbers between late September and late March, almost exclusively to the Nile Delta.' They knew of no reports of Long-eared Owl breeding in Egypt, but there have been several recent records to indicate that breeding does occur.

Ahmed Riad (pers. comm.) reported that in spring 1991 he observed a Long-eared Owl chick for sale in Cairo bird market and, similarly, in spring 1993, El Arish market, on the north-east Egyptian coast, had a juvenile Long-eared Owl for sale. In the latter case it was established that the bird had been obtained on a farm in the El Arish area. During the same period he observed a roost of three Long-eared Owls on a farm in that area. Richard Hoath provided notes and sketches compiled on 16 June 2001 during observations north of Zagazig, in the Nile Delta. At 20.00 hrs he observed an unmistakable Long-eared Owl, with ear-tufts initially erect and traces of down on the outer ear, and the tail feathers did not appear fully grown. He watched for 15 minutes and compiled a detailed description. The bird flew and could not be relocated, but two down feathers were recovered. He subsequently spoke to a local resident who stated that owls had been present for about a month. Up to five birds were present, of which three were smaller than the others. She noted that the ear-tufts were distinctive and she was also familiar with Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Little Owl *Athene noctua*.

The other observations have been made at the Gezira Club, which is the largest green space in central Cairo, and is located on an island in the Nile just south of Zamalek. Long-eared Owls have wintered at this site for several years (pers. obs.).

Andrew Grieve (*in litt.* 2004) observed three recently fledged juveniles at the Club on 31 August 1995. He also mentioned that Cheryl Wynne-Eaton had reported seeing Long-eared Owls and young in the same place on several occasions in the early 1990s. In 2002 and 2003 at least two owlets fledged there, being observed on a number of occasions from March by Jeni Darling and myself. Prior to September 2001, JD and I had observed the occasional Barn Owl and Little Owl at the club. The first Long-eared Owl was observed on 16 September 2001, when it flew to the top of a tree c.30 m away and permitted clear views confirming the identification. During autumn 2001 we continued to see the owl occasionally, and in December 2001–January 2002 we heard two Long-eared Owls calling, usually in the same area. In early March we heard begging calls and located a young owl on the golf course. Subsequently, after hearing begging calls, we found two young in the same area. On 14 March, a visiting bird-guide, Claire Spottiswoode, and I observed an adult in flight and subsequently a young owl was found 3 m up in a tree. Throughout the summer JD and I continued to observe 1–2 young owls and recorded their development.

In autumn/winter 2002–03 we regularly saw adult Long-eared Owls, but did not find any more young until early-May 2003, when one was flushed from a tree at a height of 3–4 m. A few nights later, two juveniles were observed in a tree, one at a height of c.3 m and the other above it. However, begging calls were not heard until the end of May. Throughout the summer and early autumn, until 16 October, the young were observed, but less frequently than in 2002.

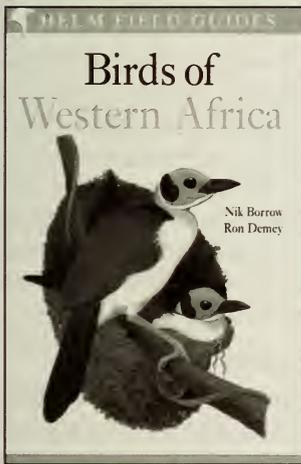
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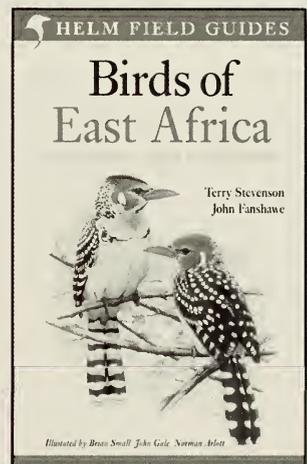
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Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: the first records for Seychelles

Camille Hoareau^a and Adrian Skerrett^b

Premières mentions de l'Ibis falcinelle *Plegadis falcinellus* pour les Seychelles. Jusqu'à 12 Ibis falcinelles *Plegadis falcinellus* ont été observés près de la piste d'atterrissage de Denis Island, le 22 février 2003, et jusqu'à six à La Passe, La Digue, de mi-janvier jusqu'au 27 mars 2003. Ces mentions ont été acceptées par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois comme les premières pour le pays.

On the morning of 22 February 2003, Camille Hoareau (CH) and Mickey Mason (MM) noted a flock of six birds beside the airstrip on Denis Island whose shape reminded CH of Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. Later the same day, 12 similar birds were seen by MM flying over his house at the northern end of the airstrip. They were identified as Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* by reference to guide books. A record form was submitted to the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC), but not before a second, possibly related sighting occurred a short time later on La Digue.

Michael Betts (MB), warden of Aride Island Nature Reserve and a member of the SBRC received a report that four birds suspected to be Glossy Ibises were present at La Passe, La Digue, at the farm of Pearson Nibourette. MB went to investigate on 12 March 2003 and confirmed the identification. He informed Adrian Skerrett (AS), who found five birds present on 15 March (Figs. 3–4, p.46). According to Pearson Nibourette, one arrived in mid-January, a second and subsequently a third during February, with four present by 11 March and five on 14 March. A visiting tourist, Peter Grundy, reported six birds there on 27 March to SBRC. There was subsequent hearsay of continued presence.

Description and identification

Head, neck and body dark chestnut-brown; wings black with shiny green and purple feathers. Legs long and dark; bill long and curved, with pale arc of bare skin at base; eye dark; face black. Only one individual, on La Digue, had a significant number of small white spots on the

neck, indicative of non-breeding plumage, although a second had a few spots. All others appeared to be adults in full breeding plumage.

Status and distribution

Glossy Ibis has a broad discontinuous breeding range from southern Europe, Africa and Madagascar to Central and southern Asia, Papua New Guinea and Australia; also on the Atlantic coast of North America and in the Caribbean. It is migratory, dispersive and notoriously nomadic, European populations migrating mainly to sub-Saharan Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

First accepted records

The records have been accepted by the SBRC as the first for Seychelles. The report of one on La Digue in mid-January would appear to distinguish this individual from the flock that appeared on Denis Island on 22 February, but some or all of the other five La Digue birds might have involved the same individuals as on Denis Island, and all sightings might relate to the same group.

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^aDenis Island, Seychelles.

^bP.O. Box 336, Victoria, Seychelles or Hazeley Brook, Keele Road, Keele, Staffs ST5 5AL, UK.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: the first two records for Seychelles

Regis Tiatousse^a, Ronald Adams^b and Adrian Skerrett^c

Premières mentions du Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralloides* pour les Seychelles. Les observations d'un Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralloides* à Mahé, le 21 septembre 2002, et à Bird Island, du 10 au 13 octobre 2002, constituent les premières mentions confirmées pour les Seychelles. Des observations antérieures de hérons du genre *Ardeola* aux Seychelles ont été acceptées par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois comme concernant le Crabier de Gray *A. grayii*, le Crabier blanc *A. idae* ou *Ardeola* sp.

On the morning of 21 September 2002, RT observed an *Ardeola* on mudflats near the Inter-Island Quay, Mahé. It was identified on brief views as a Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*. Photographs were taken, but without a large lens their quality was poor. RT was unable to relocate the bird subsequently. On 10 October 2002, RA found an *Ardeola* on Bird Island, which again was identified as a Squacco Heron. Simon Boyes, leading a bird tour on Bird, saw the heron too and agreed with the identification. He informed AS who observed the heron on 12 October (Figs. 1–2). It was seen until the next day, usually in grass adjacent to the runway.

Description and identification

With regard to the Mahé bird, RT noted white wings and tail contrasting with a pale brown back and vestiges of a breeding mane. The Bird Island individual also had white wings and tail strongly contrasting with the dark back. RA, Simon Boyes and AS moreover noted the following features that distinguished it from Madagascar Pond Heron *A. idae* and Indian Pond Heron *A. grayii*: (1) warm buff upperparts (grey-brown in *A. grayii*; mantle dark brown in *A. idae*), and upperpart coloration also more uniform, especially compared to *A. idae*, which is boldly streaked; (2) streaking on throat and breast less intense than in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*; (3) buffish crown and nape, paler than in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*; and (4) retained vestigial mane with plumes streaked buff and white (white in *A. idae* and *A. grayii*).

Status and distribution

Squacco Heron breeds from south-west and central Europe through Turkey to Iran, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa. It also breeds across much of

sub-Saharan Africa and in Madagascar where it is mainly sedentary but may move between Madagascar and East Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

First accepted record

On its first circulation of the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC), the Mahé record was accepted only as *Ardeola* sp., a category created in acknowledgement of the rare occurrence of this group. The description was deemed insufficient to adequately eliminate confusion species for a first record. Meanwhile, the Bird Island record was circulated and accepted as the first record for Seychelles. However, when RT later submitted his photographs and committee members examined enlarged copies against skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring, the Mahé record was also accepted as Squacco Heron, thus becoming, chronologically, the first record for Seychelles.

In addition, SBRC has accepted five other records as *Ardeola* sp., two of which were published as records of Squacco Heron prior to the formation of SBRC (Phillips 1984). SBRC has also accepted two out-of-range records of Madagascar Pond Heron in the granitic islands of Seychelles (the species breeds on Aldabra) and three records of Indian Pond Heron (the only records for the African region). SBRC has received verbal information of a Squacco Heron sighted on Aldabra during the 1970s by staff of the Royal Society, but to date written details have not emerged. With Squacco Heron records now having been accepted for the archipelago, Seychelles is the only country in the world to have confirmed sightings of all three *Ardeola* species.

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^aEnglish River, Mahé, Seychelles.

^bLaurel House, 38a Morthen Road, Wickersley, Rotherham S66 1EN, UK.

^cP.O. Box 336, Victoria, Seychelles or Hazeley Brook, Keele Road, Keele, Staffs ST5 5AL, UK.



Figures 3–4. Glossy Ibis / Ibis falcinelle *Plegadis falcinellus*, La Digue, Seychelles, 15 March 2003 (Adrian Skerrett)



Figures 1–2. Squacco Heron / Crabier chevelu *Ardeola ralliodes*, Bird Island, Seychelles, 12 October 2002 (Adrian Skerrett)

First record of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* for Uganda

Malcolm Wilson

Première mention du Butor étoilé *Botaurus stellaris* pour l'Ouganda. Un Butor étoilé *Botaurus stellaris* a été observé dans les rizières de Kibimba, 168 km à l'est de Kampala, Ouganda du sud-ouest (00°31'N 33°52'E), le 20 novembre 2002. Cette mention a été acceptée par le Comité d'Homologation Est Africain et constitue la première donnée pour le pays.

On the morning of 20 November 2002, a Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* was observed at the 3,900 ha Kibimba Rice Scheme, 168 km east of Kampala, south-west Uganda (00°31'N 33°52'E), by members of a bird ringing expedition consisting of Barry Williams, Ian Kerton, Chris Sharpe, Nathan Eluku and myself.

We had been ringing waders, mostly Painted-snipe *Rostratula bengalensis*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, and had just finished processing the birds by 06.30 hrs, when we saw c.70 Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* flying towards us en route to roost. An obviously larger heron flew over from the opposite direction c.30 m from us. It had a front-heavy appearance, with a thick neck and head protruding from broad, rounded shortish wings. The legs protruded about the same length as the head and neck. The plumage consisted of pale and dark tawny and buff-browns with black streaking. The bird was unlike anything I had seen in my seven years in Uganda and it took a few seconds before we realised that it was a Great Bittern. The shape and large size eliminated juvenile Black-crowned or White-backed Night Herons *Gorsachius leuconotus*. The bird flew c.100 m and landed in the next paddy, where it remained a few moments before flying out of sight.

The observation has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first definite sighting for Uganda: the species is not accepted on the revised list of Ugandan birds by Byaruhanga *et al.* (2001), on which it is only mentioned in parentheses, presumably on the basis of a 'poorly documented sight record' from West Nile (Britton 1980). The species has been reported as a vagrant from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and north-east D. R. Congo (Smith 1957, Urban & Brown 1971, Lippens & Wille 1976, Nikolaus 1987). BW, IK,

CS and myself have experience with the species in the UK.

Other sightings of interest were two Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* among 30 African Spoonbills *P. alba*, constituting the fourth and fifth confirmed records in Uganda, and three Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* (trapped), indicating that this species might be more common than the three or four Ugandan records suggest.

Acknowledgements

I thank Venu Pookat and his staff at 'Tilda Rice' for paddling the areas we wanted to work in and for the wonderful Indian cuisine at the staff canteen. Nathan helped by bringing identification guides, Paul Goldring of G & C Tours provided equipment and Bob Angier brought the Kibimba Rice Scheme site to my attention.

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- 32 'Second Avenue', 2nd Road, Hyde Park 2196, Johannesburg, South Africa. E-mail: shobill@mweb.co.za

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma baraui* off the east coast of southern Africa

Andrew Sutherland

Le Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma baraui* au large de la côte orientale de l'Afrique méridionale. Un Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma baraui* a été vu à environ 20 km à l'est de Richards Bay (28°70'S 32°40'E), KwaZulu-Natal, Afrique du Sud, le 9 novembre 2003. Ceci constitue la troisième mention de cette espèce menacée pour l'Afrique méridionale. Les deux mentions précédentes concernent un, ou peut-être deux, individus au large de la Baie de Maputo, Mozambique, le 13–14 novembre 1987, et deux individus un peu au sud de Richards Bay, Afrique du Sud, le 18 octobre 1988.

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma baraui* is a medium-sized gadfly petrel characterised by white underparts, white underwings, a dark M-mark on the upperwings and lower back, and a dark cap. It was described as recently as 1964 and breeds in high-elevation elfin forest on Réunion Island, in the western Indian Ocean, and perhaps on Rodrigues, east of Mauritius (Probst *et al.* 2000, Stahl & Bartle 1991). The species is classified as Endangered (BirdLife International 2000, 2004), with a declining population currently estimated at 8,000–10,000 birds, although recent information indicates that the decline may have been arrested following the cessation of illegal shooting (BirdLife International 2000). A recent threat to young birds appears to be disorientation by lights at night, resulting in large numbers colliding with man-made structures (Le Corre *et al.* 2002).

The species' range at sea is poorly known. It disperses widely throughout the Indian Ocean, with records north towards the Arabian Peninsula, east off Sumatra and Australia, and south to Amsterdam Island (van den Berg *et al.* 1991, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, Stahl & Bartle 1991). It is also recorded south-west of Réunion and south of Madagascar (R. Leslie pers. comm.). There are only two records from southern African waters, reported by Lambert (2001). The first was of one, possibly two, birds on 13–14 November 1987 off Maputo Bay, southern Mozambique, attending a prawn trawler within a mixed flock of *c.*1,000 seabirds, including White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Great-winged Petrels *Pterodroma macroptera* and Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*. The second record was of two individuals at 29°48'S 34°46'E, just south of

Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on 18 October 1988.

During a pelagic seabird-watching trip from Richards Bay on 9 November 2003, a single Barau's Petrel was observed at a distance of 12–100 m. The boat was in shelf-edge waters (>1,000 m deep) *c.*20 km east of Richards Bay (28°70'S 32°40'E). The petrel was attracted by chumming, which had brought in a number of White-chinned and Great-winged Petrels. It was at first thought to be a late-season Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*, a species that is common in this area up until early October. However, the white underwing (mostly dark grey in *P. mollis*) and distinct dark cap (less pronounced in *P. mollis*) eliminated that species and the bird was tentatively identified as a Barau's Petrel. This was confirmed by consulting Harrison's (1989) field guide on board.

It is noteworthy that all three sightings of Barau's Petrel in southern African waters to date have been in October–November. This trend would indicate that the species might be a passage migrant or visitor to southern African waters at this season. It may have been overlooked previously as pelagic seabird trips off KwaZulu-Natal have mainly concentrated on the trawling grounds over the continental shelf off Durban. Trips from Richards Bay are into deeper waters (>1,000 m) beyond the edge of the continental shelf. I have found that other *Pterodroma* species, such as Great-winged and Soft-plumaged Petrels, are much commoner in the deeper waters off Richards Bay than in the shallower trawling grounds (<600 m) off Durban.

Acknowledgements

David Allan and Peter Ryan commented on a draft of this note and helped with literature.

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- PO Box 10289, Meerensee 3901, South Africa.
E-mail: scobie8@iafrica.com

Little-known African Bird:
Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*, Zambia's
fig-loving endemic



Claire Spottiswoode^{a,b}, Peter Leonard^c and Michael Mills^a

Un oiseau africain peu connu: le Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*, l'endémique zambien amateur de figues. Le Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini* est la seule espèce d'oiseau endémique de la Zambie. Si certains aspects de sa biologie ont été assez bien étudiés, on ne connaît pas encore suffisamment l'écologie de l'espèce, son aire de distribution et son statut de conservation. Le barbican, actuellement considéré Quasi-Menacé, occupe principalement un type de savane boisée ouverte avec une abondance de figuiers *Ficus sycomorus*. L'espèce vit en couples ou en groupes comprenant jusqu'à six individus et a une vie sociale bien développée, avec de remarquables cérémonies de salutations. Malgré sa répartition restreinte, le Barbican de Chaplin peut être observé de façon assez prévisible à plusieurs endroits, dont les détails sont mentionnés dans l'article.



1



2



3



4

Captions are on page 51

So often endemic birds are small, brown and skulking. It is therefore unsurprising that Zambian ornithologists have long been proud of their country's only true endemic species, the striking black-and-white Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*. It appeared on Zambia's ten-shilling note in the 1960s and subsequently on the 25 Ngwee stamp.

Some aspects of the species' life history are fairly well known and its breeding biology, in particular, has been relatively well studied. However, knowledge of its distribution, ecology and threat status remains inadequate. It is currently classified as Low Risk / Near Threatened on the basis of its fragmented, easily transformed habitat, which may be decreasing (BirdLife International 2003, 2004).

Chaplin's Barbets are almost always found in open savanna grassland with scattered trees, usually where Sycamore Fig *Ficus sycomorus* trees are plentiful (Fig. 4). Although the bird has often been regarded as inextricably linked to this tree, firm evidence is presently lacking and the species' dependence on the tree requires verification (Leonard 2001). This is important since fig tree savanna is threatened, to an unknown degree, by commercial and subsistence agriculture (Leonard 2001, BirdLife International 2003). Certainly, it is

known to feed on fruits other than figs and also arthropods (Short & Horne 2001).

Chaplin's Barbet occurs within an area of c.90,000 km², from 14° to 18°S and from 26° to 29°E. However, its actual range is likely to be as small as a few hundred square kilometres, given that suitable habitat is patchy (BirdLife International 2003). Currently, it is known to occur in five of the 42 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified in Zambia. It is uncommon around the periphery of the Kafue Flats IBA, within which it is also known from Blue Lagoon National Park (Fig. 2), rare and localised in Kafue National Park IBA and Lukanga Swamps IBA, but relatively common at two sites on private land, Chisamba IBA (c.40 km north of Lusaka) and Nkanga River Conservation Area IBA (20 km north of Choma) (Leonard 2001, Leonard in prep.).

Despite Mackworth-Praed & Grant's (1962) somewhat damning assertion that 'its habits are precisely those of any other barbet of the same size', Chaplin's Barbet appears to have an unusual and well-developed social system, which probably deserves further study. Pairs or groups of up to six vigorously defend large territories (estimated at c.40 ha: Short & Horne 1988), attacking conspecifics as well as Black-collared Barbets *Lybius torquatus* and occasionally even Red-faced Mousebirds *Urocolius indicus* that intrude fruiting trees. Social interactions within the group are frequent, especially in the vicinity of a nesting tree, and shortly before or after roosting. Most conspicuous are its greeting ceremonies, involving two or more birds bouncing among adjacent branches while simultaneously giving a long, harsh cackling sequence of up to 35 seconds, curiously reminiscent of the territorial 'rallies' of Green Woodhoopoes *Phoeniculus purpureus*, and similarly accompanied by bowing and swinging motions. Individuals may also hop from side to side (even jumping over one another) and wave their wings individually (a display described in detail by Short & Horne 2001).

As for many other *Lybius* barbets, there is some evidence that the species is a cooperative breeder and a host of the Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* (Colebrook-Robjent & Stjernstedt 1976). Of 17 nests checked, eight contained eggs of Lesser Honeyguide (J. Colebrook-Robjent pers. comm.), the latter species being frequently

Captions to plate on page 50

Figure 1. Chaplin's Barbet / Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*, Nkanga River Conservation Area, Zambia (Claire Spottiswoode)

Figure 2. Chaplin's Barbet / Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*, Blue Lagoon National Park, Zambia (Mike Harrison)

Figure 3. Pair of Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*, Nkanga River Conservation Area, Zambia (Claire Spottiswoode)

Couple de Barbicans de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*, Nkanga River Conservation Area, Zambia (Claire Spottiswoode)

Figure 4. Typical habitat of Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*—grassland savanna with scattered trees, the most prominent of which is a Sycamore Fig *Ficus sycomorus*, Nkanga River Conservation Area, Zambia (Pete Leonard)

Habitat typique du Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*: savane boisée avec arbres espacés, le plus important étant le figuier *Ficus sycomorus*. Nkanga River Conservation Area, Zambia (Pete Leonard)

encountered in the nesting trees of Chaplin's Barbets during the breeding season.

Despite Chaplin's Barbet's small world range, poorly known status and esoteric habitat preferences, those wanting to see it can be consoled that it is reliably found at several sites. The privately owned IBAs mentioned previously are both easy to visit. Nkanga River Conservation Area, near Choma, in Southern Province is owned by the Bruce-Miller family (e-mail: nansai@zamnet.zm), and the turn-off to the farm is signed 2 km east of Choma on the main Lusaka road. The farmhouse is a further 20 km along a signed series of gravel roads. Camping facilities and accommodation are available, and directions to the barbet habitat can be obtained from the Bruce-Millers. At Chisamba IBA, turn east from the main Lusaka-Kabwe road c.40 km north of Lusaka, onto the road to Chisamba town. The birds can often be seen beside this road, from c.7 km along it. A number of accommodation options are available in the area. Chaplin's Barbets are most easily seen shortly after sunrise and shortly before sunset, when pairs or groups sun themselves conspicuously on the exposed branches of fig trees, giving occasional bursts of calling (Figs. 1, 3). At other times they are most easily located by listening for calls or by waiting near a fruiting tree. In the heat of the day they can be very difficult to locate as they often retreat into dense foliage.

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^a*Birding Africa*, 21 Newlands Road, Claremont 7708, South Africa. E-mails: claire@birdingafrica.com, and michael@birdingafrica.com

^bDept. of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EJ, UK.

^c46 Trenchard Close, Newton, Nottingham NG13 8HG, UK. E-mail: pleonard@care4free.net

Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*—a bibliography

P. M. Leonard^a and R. J. Dowsett^b

Le Barbican de Chaplin *Lybius chaplini*—une bibliographie. Afin d'aider les futurs chercheurs, une bibliographie annotée est présentée.

Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini* is the only species of bird truly endemic to Zambia. It was first described by Clarke (1920) and was named after Sir Drummond Chaplin (1866–1933) who was the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia at the time.

Although its distribution, general habits and breeding behaviour are fairly well known, comparatively little research has been undertaken on the species, which is somewhat surprising given its endemic status, that it is considered Near Threatened by BirdLife International and that it is relatively easily observed in its range. Given that Zambia has sole responsibility for the species' conservation, it is hoped that more thorough studies will be carried out in the near future. Such research invariably commences with a literature search, thus the aim of this bibliography is to complete such a first phase.

In the following list of references, short summaries of the contents of each entry are included.

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In addition to these titles, the Newsletter of the Zambian Ornithological Society has published many sightings of the species and several breeding records.

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^a46 Trenchard Close, Newton, Nottingham NG13 8HG, UK. E-mail: pleonard@care4free.net

^b12 rue des Lavandes, Ganges F-34190, France. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com

Photospot:

Mascarene Grey White-eye *Zosterops borbonicus* with yellow forehead

Jens and Heidi Hering

Zostérops des Mascareignes *Zosterops borbonicus* avec un front jaune. Il est bien connu que les zostérops ou 'oiseaux-lunettes' (Zosteropidae) sont friands de nectar et que, leur bec étant relativement court, ceci provoque souvent la coloration de leur front par du pollen. Les photos reproduites ici montrent des Zostérops des Mascareignes *Zosterops borbonicus* dont le front est jaune par l'adhésion de pollen de l'arbuste *Sophora tetraptera*.

White-eyes (Zosteropidae) are well known to be fond of nectar (Fry & Keith 2000) and, their bills being relatively short, this often leads to colouring of the forehead by pollen. We observed a remarkable example of this while watching five Mascarene Grey White-eyes *Zosterops borbonicus* around the Piton de la Fournaise, Réunion, on 11 September 2003. This species, one of the commonest resident birds on the island, is normally rather drab greyish to brownish, especially on the head and the upperparts, the white rump and white 'epaulettes' being the only contrasting features (Barré *et al.* 1996). The five Mascarene Grey White-eyes at Piton de la Fournaise, however, all had bright yellow foreheads (Figs. 1–2) through

feeding on the flowers of a Kowhai *Sophora tetraptera* bush, thereby colouring the front part of their heads with yellow pollen.

Acknowledgements

Sabine Etges identified the *Sophora tetraptera* bush.

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Wolkenburger Straße 11, 09212 Limbach-Oberfrohna, Germany. E-mail: jenshering.vso-bibliothek@t-online.de.



Figures 1–2. Mascarene Grey White-eye *Zosterops borbonicus* with yellow forehead in a Kowhai *Sophora tetraptera* bush, Piton de la Fournaise, Réunion, September 2003 (Jens Hering)

Zostérops des Mascareignes *Zosterops borbonicus* avec un front jaune, dans un arbuste Kowhai *Sophora tetraptera*, Piton de la Fournaise, Réunion, septembre 2003 (Jens Hering)

Birding Tunisia—off the beaten track

Mark Cocker

Observer les oiseaux en Tunisie—en dehors des sentiers battus. La plupart des sites mentionnés dans les rapports de visites ornithologiques privées en Tunisie se situent dans la région touristique du nord-est, autour des villes de Hammamet et de Sousse. Les données concernant ces sites étant facilement accessibles, l'auteur préfère attirer l'attention sur des sites intéressants du point de vue ornithologique qui sont peu visités et qui pourraient mériter des investigations complémentaires. Une dizaine de sites, situés dans le nord et le sud du pays, sont ainsi présentés.

The main purposes of this article are, first, to act as a brief reminder of the high-quality birding in this diverse, readily accessible and fascinating country, and, second, to highlight a number of less-visited locations which may well deserve further investigation. I should also point out that the article is written from the perspective of a non-resident (mainly based on a few personal visits) and is aimed largely at visiting ABC members. I trust native Tunisian members will forgive an intrusion on their 'territory', and at least enjoy the piece as a restatement of something they already well appreciate—Tunisia is a great place to watch birds.

Tunisia as a birding destination—a brief overview

Tunisia is a fraction over 160,000 km² (a little larger than England and Wales combined) and contains a high diversity of landscapes and habitats in a relatively short distance. It has a long coastline on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and a long narrowing 'wedge' of territory reaching into the Sahara desert almost to 30°N. Squeezed between two large and presently little-visited Islamic republics—Algeria to the west and Libya to the east—Tunisia also has long traditions of political stability and cultural tolerance. An important tourist industry has thrived for decades and the Tunisian people's universal courtesy to foreigners is extraordinary. Although frequent police road checkpoints are a minor irritation, tourists are not a high priority and the police will only occasionally stop and ask for identification and car-hire documents.

As a birding destination, the country has perhaps been overshadowed by Morocco, which is almost three times the size, has a far larger

altitudinal range (owing to the presence of the Atlas Mountains) and, as a consequence, a more varied avifauna, as well as reliable sites for some charismatic or rare North African birds, but Tunisia has several compensatory merits. It is remarkably compact (for example, pristine desert habitats can be reached in just half a day's drive from the main airport); it is well served by an excellent road network; English and French are widely spoken and there is a broad range of hotels, restaurants and other amenities even in some of the most remote spots; hire cars are widely available and apparently decreasing in cost. Finally, the bias shown by birders towards Morocco means that visitors to Tunisia have an opportunity to make valuable contributions to its national ornithology. There is a flourishing and highly active society, Association 'Les Amis des Oiseaux', the BirdLife International partner organisation, and anyone visiting Tunisia is encouraged to contact them and submit their ornithological records (Ariana Center—Bureau C 209, Avenue 18 Janvier 1952, 2080 Ariana, Tunisia, tel./fax: +216 71 717 860, e-mail: aao.bird@planet.tn).

Northern Tunisia

'Tourist' Tunisia largely lies on the north-east coast and is centred on the cities of Hammamet and Sousse. As a consequence, many of the bird sites listed in the informal body of privately printed reports (available from Foreign Birdwatching Reports and Information Service; see *Bull. ABC* 10: 36) are in this area. The aim here is not to repeat these readily accessible site details, but to highlight localities that are less well known or that have possibly been overlooked altogether.

Sidi Jedidi

There is a small relatively new and bird-rich barrage immediately west of the village of Sidi Jedidi. Although not marked on Michelin map no. 956 for the country, it is easily found on a minor road that leaves Hammamet and heads almost due west towards the larger town of Zaghouan. It can be reached in *c.*20-minutes drive from Hammamet. The roughly 'L' shaped waterbody is readily viewable from the road that runs along its southern edge or from a raised dam on its east side.

It has been known for at least ten years as a wintering site for two globally threatened wildfowl, **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* and **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* (Fig. 5), and detailed counts in October 2003 indicated that the barrage is increasing in importance for wetland birds. There were at least 1,700 individuals of seven species, including **Ferruginous Duck** (235), **White-headed Duck** (71), **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (71), **Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* (70), **Northern Shoveler** *A. clypeata* (98), **Common Pochard** *A. ferina* (406), and **Common Coot** *Fulica atra* (864). Counts at the same site on 23 January 2003 by a Slender-billed Curlew survey team produced a total for the same seven species of just 125 birds (Azafzaf & Feltrup-Azafzaf 2003), which suggests that wildfowl populations may well be highly seasonal. Nevertheless, the October counts for Ferruginous and White-headed Ducks are amongst the highest for any Tunisian wetland and underscore the site's potential importance. White-headed Ducks were also seen there in May 2004, which may indicate that there is a small breeding population.

Other noteworthy sightings in the wetland habitats include migrant **Squacco** *Ardeola ralloides* and **Purple Herons** *Ardea purpurea*, **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, breeding **Eurasian Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* and a single record of **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio* (February 2001). There is a high steep ridge of exposed rock that runs alongside the lake and almost through the village of Sidi Jedidi. In parts it is covered in open, goat-grazed pinewoods and amongst these and on the more exposed rocky outcrops are breeding **Thekla Larks** *Galerida theklae*, **Black**

Wheatears *Oenanthe leucura*, as well as the beautiful North African endemic **Moussier's Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri*, and **Blue Rock Thrushes** *Monticola solitarius*. Both **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* and **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* are regular above and around the lake.

Barrage Oued R'mel

This larger and highly promising wetland (Figs. 1–2) lies *c.*15 km west of Sidi Jedidi along the Zaghouan road and is about a 40-minute drive from Hammamet. It is reached by driving *c.*2 km along a small south-running tarmac road that leaves the main route in the village of Ain Saboune. Where the track reaches the water's edge an old bridge offers a good vantage over the lake and its wet margins. The lake holds significant numbers of wintering wildfowl and both **Ferruginous** and **White-headed Duck** remain in spring, suggesting that these species may breed. In addition, it attracts a range of migrant waterbirds like **Great Egret** *Egretta alba*, **Purple and Squacco Herons**, **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*, **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* (also a possible breeder) and **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*.

Thuburbo Maius Marsh

This wetland, whose real name I have been unable to locate, lies near the ancient Roman ruins of Thuburbo Maius, on either side of the C28 road between the towns of El Fahs and Mejez El Bab, 58 km south-west of Tunis. The most productive part of the marsh is *c.*10 km north-west of Thuburbo Maius on the north side of the C28 and consists of a large shallow weed-fringed freshwater lagoon. Approximately 3 km further west (and south of the C28) is a very large saline pan. This huge expanse can be approached from a badly rutted tarmac road that runs south off the C28 from a crossroads where the sign indicates 32 km to Mejez el Baba and 14 km to El Fahs. The saltpan is rather inaccessible and in three visits I observed only flocks of several hundred **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus ruber*. However, given that in October 2003 there were *c.*7,000 birds in total in the area, the pan may well be an important feeding area, whilst the entire site may be of national importance for the species.

The most productive part of the complex is the freshwater pool north of the road, which is easily viewed from beside the C28. It appears to be an important stopover for spring and autumn migrant waders and other wetland birds including Marbled Duck (in May 2004), Common Crane *Grus grus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Pied Avocet *Avocetta recurvirostris*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Black, White-winged *C. leucopterus* and Whiskered Terns *C. hybrida*. Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus* and Lanner were also seen there in May 2004, and a notable sighting in February 2001 was a flock of 25 wintering Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*.

El Feidja National Park

Tunisia has very little true montane habitat (Djebel Chambi, near the town of Kasserine in central Tunisia, is the tallest peak at just 1,544 m), but some of the best forest, dominated by *Quercus suber* and *Q. canariensis* (Amari & Azafzaf 2001) can be found in a range of hills, which reach just 1,130 m at their summit, north of the small town of Ghardimaou, close to the Tunisian–Algerian border.

The site (Figs. 3–4) is reached by a minor road, signposted to Ain Soltane (clearly marked on Michelin map 956), which runs north-west off the main P6 route through Ghardimaou towards the Algerian frontier. The site's border location and El Feidja's status as a national park mean that access is only with permission from the park headquarters. At Feidja the local police were summoned to investigate our presence and the park authorities are largely unfamiliar with non-Tunisian birdwatchers 'armed' with suspicious-looking optical equipment. However, once permission was granted the staff was highly welcoming. Thus, with appropriate (preferably advance) permission, no birder should have any difficulty visiting this wonderful site (Le Conservateur du Parc National d'El Feidja, 816 Ghardimaou, Tunisie. Tel.: [97] 675844 and [98] 468267).

El Feidja is exceptional not only for its wider, rather bizarre atmosphere of a 'northern European' oak woodland located in Africa, but also for its suite of North African endemic bird

taxa. This includes three woodpeckers, which are all very tame, conspicuous and present at relatively high densities: Levaillant's Woodpecker *Picus vaillantii*, the distinctive red-chested *numidus* race of Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* and the isolated *leudoci* race of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *D. minor*. Other very common birds of the oak forest include the *mauretanicus* form of Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*, the distinctive *leudoci* race of Coal Tit *Parus ater*, which has khaki brown upperparts, lemon underparts and bright yellow cheeks, and the strikingly beautiful North African Blue Tit *P. caeruleus ultramarinus* (which, with other members of the North African/Canarian group of taxa within this complex, has recently been found to differ significantly in its DNA profile: Salzburger *et al.* 2002). Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* and Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* are highly localised species in North Africa, but both are common at Feidja. We also saw the white-faced, black-crowned race of Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius cervicalis* and found several singing Atlas Flycatchers *Ficedula speculigera*, which has recently been proposed as a separate species (Sætre *et al.* 2001). The woods hold high densities of Wild Boar *Sus scrofula* and their signs can be found everywhere, whilst an important project in the national park is the protection of the endemic form of the Red Deer *Cervus elaphus barbarus*. A captive-bred population is currently being developed at the park headquarters.

Beni M'tir

For visitors to El Feidja there are apparently small hotels in Ghardimaou and there are several in the larger town of Jendouba, which is only c.35 km to the east on the P6 road. However, the same suite of forest birds can be found at greater convenience near to the more northern resort town of Ain Drahem. The whole area around the latter has remnant patches of oak woodland. Some of these woods are extensive and of high quality, holding all of the birds listed for El Feidja, if not in such densities nor in so pristine and scenic a context. One such area was c.2 km along the C65 road towards the village of Beni M'tir. The turning for this road is

c.7 km south of Ain Draham off the main Ain Draham–Jendouba road (P17).

Hammam Bourguiba Valley

Another area with the complete suite of woodland birds is situated in the valley towards the small settlement of Hammam Bourguiba, c.5 km north of Ain Draham, where the valley road runs south-west off the P17 in Babouch. We explored the first 2–3 km and **Levaillant's Woodpecker** was particularly common.

Southern Tunisia

Central southern Tunisia is dominated by the Chott el Jerid, a large flat salt basin that covers 4,600 km². The peripheral oases with their natural springs, associated groves of cultivated date palm and open brackish-water pools on the edge of the desert have long been a major draw for migrant birds and birders alike. The small town of Douz is one of the main destinations and there is a suite of sites around the town productive for both desert specialities and concentrations of wetland migrants. Once again, however, I wish to draw attention to less-visited areas rather than the well-known localities.

Douz–Redjim Maatoug

The small settlement of El Hsai, c.5 km south of Douz, was formerly one of the few places in the Western Palearctic accessible by tarmac road where **Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex* could be found (Figs. 7–8). The species has not apparently been seen for a number of years at the site and exploration of the area further south, which now comprises the Jbil National Park (Amari & Azafzaf 2001), is only possible with four-wheel-drive vehicles.

However, a good tarmac road (not always shown on maps of Tunisia) now continues along the southern edge of the Chott el Jerid to the small remote settlement of Redjim Maatoug, which is c.110 km south-west of Douz. Unlike El Hsai, which had no *Passer* concentrations, Redjim Maatoug had an extremely large House Sparrow *P. domesticus* colony involving hundreds, if not thousands of birds. It also had good stands of a desert grass, tentatively identified as awn grass *Aristida* sp., which is considered an important component of Desert Sparrow habitat (Summers-Smith 1988, Densley 1990). Given the erratic and nomadic distribution pattern of

this little-known species, the desert village may repay further investigation.

The route to Redjim Maatoug passes through a wide variety of desert landscapes, from open vegetation-free flats to bushy scrub. Most of the region's speciality birds can be seen from this road, like the beautiful and distinctive *elegans* form of **Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis* (we saw a recently fledged family party feeding on a migrant **Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* in Redjim Maatoug), **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* and **Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*, which seems to show a marked attraction for feeding on the tarmac itself (Cocker in prep.). In May 2004 we also found **Bar-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura* and **Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana*, both of which were nest building. **Greater Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* could be heard singing and seen performing its extraordinary display flight virtually every time we stopped.

The best policy is probably to make a number of sorties off the road, wherever a notable change of landform occurs. The stretch between kilometre posts 21 to 9 km from Redjim Maatoug was particularly rewarding. We also observed a number of interesting European migrants including **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*, **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*, **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* and a large passage of **European Turtle Doves** *Streptopelia turtur*.

Given the highly isolated nature of the Redjim Maatoug road, visitors should ensure the car has a full tank of petrol (none is available except at Douz) and is well supplied with water. They should not drive off the tarmac unless with a properly equipped four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Chebika–Moulares

North of the large oasis palmery at Tozeur is a second smaller salt basin, the Chott el Gharsa. This is crossed by the P16 road and is well used by 'desert safari' convoys of tourists wishing to see the picturesque abandoned Berber villages of Chebika, Mides and Tameghza (also spelt Tamerza). The P16 runs north-west for c.50 km to Chebika, then turns sharply to follow the Oued Sendess to the north-east through a steep rocky valley until it reaches Tameghza, where it

is flanked to the west by barren crags. These impressive formations mark the Algerian–Tunisian border. After Tameghza the road (which becomes the C201) crosses a level plain with large areas of semi-natural grassland interspersed with cereal cultivation. The mixture of extensive arable crops and grassland continues on both sides of the road for the 18 km beyond a settlement called Redeyef and before one reaches the mining town of Moulares. This whole area is worth exploring and holds a number of North African specialities.

Chebika and environs

The gravel flats in the few kilometres both before and after the (north) turning for the Chebika palmery hold **Cream-coloured Courser**, **Red-rumped Oenanthe moesta** and **Desert Wheatears**. We also found a dead **Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius* (Fig. 6) on the road, c.7 km before Chebika, which suggests that the area would be well worth visiting at dusk (Tozeur has many hotels and there are at least two in nearby Tameghza). There were also **Desert Ammomanes deserti** and **Bar-tailed Larks** in the area, as well as **House Buntings** *Emberiza striolata* and **Trumpeter Finches** *Bucanetes githagineus*. Where the road winds through a steep-sided valley we saw several **White-crowned Oenanthe leucopyga** and **Mourning Wheatears** *O. lugens* on the rocky slopes. The sheer gorge on the west side of the oasis also holds breeding **Alpine Tachymarptis melba** and **Little Swifts** *Apus affinis*. The presence of the latter is noteworthy, given its mysteriously fragmented distribution in Tunisia.

Tameghza

In Tameghza itself a side street turns south off the P16 towards the river and the so-called 'Falls'. This steep-sided valley, with its permanent water flow, associated orchards and lush vegetation, is a magnet for migrants in both spring and autumn, including **Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*, **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* and **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*.

Redeyef–Moulares

The 18-km stretch of C201 road between these two towns is flanked by interesting higher altitude grassland, which has been widely convert-

ed for cereal production. Nevertheless c.9 km before Moulares is an area of semi-natural habitat with an interesting suite of species including **Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oediacnemus*, very high densities of breeding **Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens* with much smaller numbers of **Greater Short-toed Lark** *C. brachydactyla* and **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*. Another common breeder is **Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata*. **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* may well breed here, whilst **European Turtle Dove** and **Montagu's Harrier** were both migrating through the area in spring 2004.

In October 2003 a **Dupont's Lark** *Chersophilus duponti* was seen at this site, although there was no evidence of a breeding population in May 2004. Nevertheless there are large flats covered in *Artemisia*-like scrub in the area, notably north of the C201 between Tameghza and Redeyef and off the C201 to the south-east of Moulares (i.e. en route to the other mining town of Metlaoui). The species may well breed in the area, which thus warrants much more careful exploration.

Hichem Azafaf is one of the country's leading birders and has participated in many national census projects as well as co-authored the Tunisian chapter of *Important Bird Areas in Africa* (Amari & Azafaf 2001). He is pleased to hear from anyone visiting the country and receive trip reports (Groupe Tunisien d'Ornithologie, 11 Rue Abou el alla el maari, Cité El Houada, 2080 Ariana, Tunisia. Tel./Fax: +216-71-701664. Mobile: +216-98-207238. E-mail: azafaf@gnet.tn)

Captions to plate on opposite page

- Figures 1–2** Barrage Oued R'mal (Hichem Azafaf)
Figures 3–4 El Feidja National Park / Parc National de Feidja (Hichem Azafaf)
Figure 5 Male White-headed Duck / Erismature à tête blanche *Oxyura leucocephala* (Hichem Azafaf)
Figure 6 Egyptian Nightjar / Engoulevent du désert *Caprimulgus aegyptius* (Hichem Azafaf)
Figure 7 Female Desert Sparrow / Moineau blanc, femelle, *Passer simplex* (Hichem Azafaf)
Figure 8 Male Desert Sparrow / Moineau blanc, mâle, *Passer simplex* (Hichem Azafaf)



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Recent Reports



These are largely unconfirmed records published for interest only; records are mostly from 2004, with a few from earlier dates. We thank all birders who have sent in their records and urge them to submit full details to the relevant national or regional organisations. It is suggested that observations of each species be compared with relevant literature to set new data in context and that observers who are unfamiliar with the status of birds in a particular country refer to R. J. Dowsett's (1993) *Afrotropical avifaunas: annotated country checklists* (in: R. J. Dowsett and F. Dowsett-Lemaire. *A Contribution to the*

Distribution and Taxonomy of Afrotropical and Malagasy Birds. Tauraco Res. Rep. 5. Liège: Tauraco Press) or more recent or appropriate sources before submitting records.

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Les observations ci-après sont en majeure partie non confirmées et sont publiées uniquement dans le but d'informer. La plupart des données sont de 2004; quelques-unes sont plus anciennes. Nous remercions tous les ornithologues qui ont pris la peine de nous faire parvenir leurs données et nous recommandons de les envoyer, dûment docu-

mentées, aux organisations nationales ou régionales concernées. Il est conseillé de vérifier le statut des espèces observées dans la littérature appropriée, afin de mettre les nouvelles données en perspective, et de consulter notamment R. J. Dowsett (1993) *Afrotropical avifaunas: annotated country checklists* (in: R. J. Dowsett and F. Dowsett-Lemaire. *A Contribution to the Distribution and Taxonomy of Afrotropical and Malagasy Birds*. Tauraco Res. Rep. 5. Liège: Tauraco Press) ou des sources plus récentes ou appropriées.

Algeria

In 2004, three pairs of **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* raised three, five and eight young in a Saharan wetland near El Golea, and a pair of **Marbled Ducks** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* raised three young in a wetland near Ouargla (AM, AB & BC).

Azores

The following records are from May–November 2004. A **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* was seen at Lagoa Azul, Terceira, from 2 November. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* was at Capelo, Faial, during the second week of May. A **Snowy Egret** *Egretta thula* stayed at Horta harbour/Porto Pim, Faial, from 20 May until late October at least; another was found on Terceira in October. A **Little Egret** *E. garzetta* was seen at Vila do Porto, Santa Maria, on 28 June, and a **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* on Praia Islet, Graciosa, on 14–21 June. A **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* was present at Lagoa Verde, São Miguel, on 9 September. A **Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* of presumed wild origin was still at Terra Nostra gardens, Furnas,

São Miguel, on 12 July. At Reservatorio do Cabrito, Terceira, a female **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* was observed on 21–22 October and up to three **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris* were noted on 11–23 October, whilst on São Miguel, **Ring-necked Ducks** were seen at Lagoa Azul on 9 September and 4–7 November (singles), at Lagoa das Furnas on 3 November (one), and at Lagoa Seca on 3–5 November (two). An **American Coot** *Fulica americana* at Lagoa das Furnas, São Miguel, first reported on 14 October, was still present on 5 November.

Nearctic waders on Terceira, most of them at Cabo da Praia, included single **Semipalmated Plovers** *Charadrius semipalmatus* on 30 August and 11–23 October, two **White-rumped Sandpipers** *Calidris fuscicollis* on 10–13 October, a **Baird's Sandpiper** *C. bairdii* on 21 October (with another at Faja dos Cubres, São Jorge, on 17–18 October), a **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos* and a juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* on 1 September, single **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* on 30 July

and 7 October, and up to three on 11–23 October (with one at Mosteiros, São Miguel, on 12 September), and a **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* on 11 October. Other wader records include a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* at Mosteiros, São Miguel, on 10–12 September and at Porto Pim, Faial, on 4 October, and four **Whimbrels** *Numenius phaeopus* at Porto Pim on 4 May, two on Praia Islet, Graciosa, on 20 June, and ten at Cabo da Praia, Terceira, on 30 July. The reports of single **Hudsonian Godwits** *Limosa haemastica* from Terceira, on 6 September 2003 and 15–17 February 2004 (Bull. ABC 11: 169) referred, in fact, to **Hudsonian Whimbrels** *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*.

A juvenile **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* with a broken wing was found on Corvo on 9 August. A **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* was at Cabo da Praia, Terceira, on 31 October. Single **Bridled Terns** *S. anaethetus* were reported from Mosteiros, São Miguel, on 11 July, from Vila Islet on 7–8 July, and from Praia Islet, Graciosa, on 31



Figure 1. Common Rock Thrush / Monticole merle-de-roche *Monticola saxatilis*, Bird Island, Seychelles, 10 October 2004 (Georges Norah)



Figure 3. Amur Falcon / Faucon de l'Amour *Falco amurensis*, Bird Island, Seychelles, 3 December 2004 (Georges Norah)



Figure 2. Red-billed Tropicbird / Phaéton à bec rouge *Phaethon aethereus*, Aride, Seychelles, 30 October 2004 (Dylan Evans)



Figure 4. Eurasian Oystercatcher / Huitrier pie *Haematopus ostralegus*, Aride, Seychelles, 28 April 2004 (Ron Gerlach)

July. A **Sooty Tern** *S. fuscata*—perhaps the same bird as in 2003—remained on Praia Islet, Graciosa, during June and was seen incubating an egg on at least 12–19th; this represented the first breeding attempt of the species on Praia, but the fact that incubation took place only on about one day out of two suggested that the bird had lost its partner. Also on Praia Islet, an adult Sooty Tern was observed on 5 September. Two **Barn Owls** *Tyto alba* were seen on São Miguel on 11 July: one at Lago and one in the gardens of the Bahia Palace Hotel. A juvenile **Purple Martin** *Progne subis* was photographed at Facho, Flores, on 6 September (per *Birding World* 17: 239, 282, 330, 380, 414 & 464; per *Dutch Birding* 25: 343 & 396–399).

Botswana

A **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* was claimed from the south-east, on the Botswana side of the Limpopo River, near Stevensford Lodge, north of Sherwood, on 28 August 2004 (HH per TH). In the Kwando River Concession, in the north, four **Angola Swallows** *Hirundo angolensis* were present on 29 September; this appears to be the first record for Botswana (RR per TH).

Burkina Faso

A **Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus* was seen at Gonse, on 8 November 2003; this is further north than previously published records. **Four-banded Sandgrouse** *Pterocles quadricinctus* with chicks were seen at Gonse, on 24 January 2004; there are few breeding data from Burkina (PB).

Cameroon

The juvenile **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga*, reported from Waza National Park on 11 April 2003 (*Bull ABC* 11: 169), would constitute the third, not the second record for Cameroon; the first was also from Waza, in 1972, and the second from Maga, in February 2000 (ML, KYN).

Records from February–November 2004 include the following. A juvenile male **Black-bellied Bustard**



African Pitta *Pitta angolensis*
by Mark Andrews

Eupodotis melanogaster was present at Kumbo, in grassland above 2,000 m, on 25 May. Two **White-naped Pigeons** *Columba albinucha* were at Quibeko, near Fontem, at 2,000 m on 27 February. At a cliff face near Kumbo, three **Scarce Swifts** *Schoutedenapus myioptilus* were seen on 1 July. A **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* migrated with 30+ Common Swifts *A. apus* over Kumbo on 31 March. A **Fire-bellied Woodpecker** *Dendropicos pyrrhogaster* was at Fontem on 5 March. Two **Ethiopian Swallows** *Hirundo aethiopica* were recorded at Nguti on 6–8 July and four at Mamfe on 9 July. At Fomenji, near Fontem, a **Bocage's Akalat** *Sheppardia bocagei* was seen in November, and a **Grey Ground Thrush** *Zoothera princei* was observed at Fontem on 5 March (RS). At Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, an adult female **African Pitta** *Pitta angolensis* with a large brood patch and a cloacal protuberance, suggesting breeding, was mist-netted on 26 March, and a **Black-eared Ground Thrush** *Zoothera camerounensis* on 31st (KYN). **Red-cheeked Wattle-eyes** *Dyaphorophya blissetti* were noted at Fontem on 5 March (three) and at Lower Foto and Bechati (between Fontem, Wabane and Widikum; a few) in November. In the same area, also in November,

Green-throated Sunbirds

Chalcomitra rubescens of the distinctive and local race *crossensis* were recorded at Besali, Bechati and Fossimondi (RS).

Field work in Mbulu Forest, in the Njikwa area near the Nigerian border, South-west Province, in late April 2004, found c.230 bird species, among them **Bamenda Apalis** *Apalis bamendae*, **White-throated Mountain Babbler** *Kupeornis gilberti*, **Ursula's Sunbird** *Cinnyris ursulae*, **Bocage's Bush-shrike** *Malaconotus bocagei* and **Rachel's Malimbe** *Malimbus racheliae* (KYN).

Canary Islands

Reports from the period June–October 2004 include the following. Seven **Fea's Petrels** *Pterodroma feae*, 48 **Bulwer's Petrels** *Bulweria bulwerii* and 21 **White-faced Storm-petrels** *Pelagodroma marina* were seen from the Cadiz (Spain) to Gran Canaria ferry on 21 July. Exceptional numbers of White-faced Storm-petrels were also seen from the ferries between the islands in late July: 12 (plus 48 Bulwer's Petrels) between Gran Canaria and Tenerife on 22nd, one between Tenerife and La Gomera on 23rd, and 27 (plus 13 Bulwer's Petrels) between Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria on 29th. A single **Madeiran Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma castro* was seen between Gran Canaria and Tenerife on 22 July.

The escaped **Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis* was still at Playa de Sotavento, Fuerteventura, on 17 July. Up to 22 **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* were at Embalse de Los Molinos, Fuerteventura, in July. Two male **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris*, first photographed at Rosa de Catalina García, Fuerteventura, on 14 October 2003, were still present in July. A **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circus gallicus* was observed at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on 14 November. A first-year **American Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio martinica* was picked up at Puerto Rico village, Gran Canaria, on 19 October, taken into care and released on 2 November. An **African Desert**

Warbler *Sylvia (nana) deserti* was reported c.5 km west of Corralejo, Fuerteventura, on 23 July; if accepted, this will be the second or third for the Canaries. Two Pied Crows *Corvus albus* at Las Crucitas, Gran Canaria, on 15 June were presumed to be escapes (TC; per *Birding World* 17: 239, 282, 330 & 465; per *Dutch Birding* 26: 333–344 & 396).

Cape Verde Islands

In August 2004, the Endangered Cape Verde Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipedennis* was discovered breeding on Fogo, where c.30 territories were found in coffee plantations with scattered fruit trees. Previously, the species was known to breed only on Santiago and São Nicolau. The population on Santiago was estimated at 800–1,000 pairs, mostly in *Eucalyptus* forest with dense undergrowth (JH per *Birding World* 17: 464–465).

Congo

In the Pointe-Noire area, at the coast, the following records were made in 2002–2004. Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (on 27 October 2003), Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* (many occasions) and Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (a group of about six on 27 October 2003 and, possibly the same, on 28 January 2004), all appear to be additions to the Congo list. Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* was seen on 29 January 2004; this species was previously known only from a single, old inland record. Single Namaqua Doves *Oena capensis* were observed on 22 November 2002 and 23 May 2003 at two different sites; there are few records of this species for Congo. White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus* was noted on 26 January and 21 May 2003, also at two different sites; there is only one previous record for Congo, from 1991, also from Pointe-Noire (RV).

A pair of Familiar Chats *Cercomela familiaris* found at Ngouédi, close to the DR Congo border, halfway between Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville, on 12 September

2004, appears to be another first for the country (RV).

In August–November 2004, over 40 species were added to the Lac Télé list, which now totals almost 340 species, amongst which were Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi* (a few migrants in October), Little Buttonquail *Turnix sylvaticus* (common in flooded grassland), Striped Crake *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis* (two seen), White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (two on 24 November), Green Turaco *Tauraco persa*, Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*, Cassin's Spinetail *Neafrapus cassini*, Cassin's Honeybird *Prodotiscus insignis*, Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga*, Red-throated Cliff Swallow *Hirundo rufigula* (common in August–October), Golden Greenbul *Calyptocichla serina*, White-bearded Greenbul *Criniger ndussumensis*, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone batesi*, Reichenbach's Sunbird *Anabathmis reichenbachii*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* and White-collared Starling *Grafisia torquata*. Other species of interest included Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* (a former breeder apparently hunted to extinction in the 1980s) and Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* (c.10 passing through in October) (HR).

In the same period, Black-winged Stilt was seen near Impfondo and Hoopoe *Upupa epops* at Kabo, north of Ouesso. Four Forest Swallows *Hirundo fuliginosa* were observed near Bomassa, Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in July (HR).

Egypt

The following records are from June–October 2004. Four Pink-backed Pelicans *Pelecanus rufescens* and 40 Yellow-billed Storks *Mycteria ibis* were at Abu Simbel on 23 June. Two Little Crakes *Porzana parva* were found at Crocodile Island on 30 September and 1 October. A Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* was at El Gouna golf course on 25–26 September. On the Red Sea coast, nine White-tailed Plovers *Vanellus leucurus* and five Terek

Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus* were at Hamata on 26–29 September, whilst single Namaqua Doves *Oena capensis* were occasionally seen at Bir Shalatein and Hamata throughout the period. A Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe* was noted at Bir Shalatein on 28–29 September (only the second for Egypt; the first was at Gebel Elba in November 2000). Two clumps of *Tamarix* 20 km north of Hamata held c.70 Eastern Orphea Warblers *Sylvia (hortensis) crassirostris* and three Barred Warblers *S. nisoria* on 21 August (per *Birding World* 17: 282, 330 & 414).

During a Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* breeding survey at Wadi El Gemal National Park (WGNP), Red Sea Governorate, on 3–10 September, c.150–170 breeding pairs were recorded on Wadi El Gemal Island, with an additional 21 breeding pairs on three of the four islands of the Qulan archipelago. On 9 September the first known probable breeding Sooty Falcons were noted within the interior of WGNP along the Gebel Sartut Range. One was harassing a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (the last reported observation of this species in Egypt was in November 2000). A second Sooty Falcon approached a soaring Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* (TCo).

Ethiopia

Records from October 2004 include the following. A Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, of which there are few records for Ethiopia, was seen in the Yabello area on 26th. Three Water Thick-knees *Burhinus vermiculatus* were on the Daua River on 23rd; this is a little-known species in Ethiopia. Two Greater Sand Plovers *Charadrius leschenaultii* were found on the mudflats at Lake Abiata on 18th. These are apparently the first for Ethiopia; they were identified by their larger size than the many nearby Kittlitz's and Ringed Plovers and by their long, heavy bill and greenish-grey legs. A Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* was flushed from its roost along the Daua River, and sub-



Eastern Wattled Cuckoo-shrike
Lobotos oriolinus by Mark Andrews

sequently observed in detail, on 23 October; this appears to be a major range extension: the species is not even known from north-east Kenya or adjacent Somalia (NB).

Gabon

A male Eastern Wattled Cuckoo-shrike *Lobotos oriolinus* was foraging in a small tree along the Bélinga road in September 2004; this is a rarely seen species throughout its range (NB). At least two Dja River Warblers *Bradypterus grandis* were singing daily in Langoue Bai, Ivindo National Park, on 15–18 October 2004 (RW).

The Gambia

Records from October–December 2004 include the following. A Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* was at Lamin, near Abuko, Western Division, in November (VA), and a White Stork *C. ciconia* at Prufu Swamp, Upper River Division, on 4 December (CB, DG, BM, KR). A dark-phase European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* and a Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus* were observed at Bao-Bolon, North Bank Division, on 31 October (CB). A Red-thighed Sparrowhawk *Accipiter erythropus* with very rufous underparts was watched at Pirang, Western Division,

on 30 November (CB, DG, BM). Also in November, two adult Lesser Moorhens *Gallinula angulata* with a juvenile were between Kaur and Georgetown, Central River Division (VA). An independent juvenile Black Coucal *Centropus grillii* was at Sapu, Central River Division, on 2 December (CB, DG, BM). A pair of Spotted Eagle Owls *Bubo africanus* with a juvenile, at Mandina, Western Division, in November, is indicative of breeding in the country (VA). Single road-killed Red-necked Nightjars *Caprimulgus ruficollis* were found in Central River Division at Kaur on 31 October and near Georgetown on 2 November (CB). An Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* flew over Sabi, near Basse, Upper River Division, in a mixed flock of swifts and hirundines, on 2 November (KR); the remains of an Alpine Swift were recovered under a nest of Red-necked Falcon *Falco chiqueira* near this site earlier in the year and constituted the fourth record for The Gambia (Bull. ABC 11: 173–174). Over 1,000 European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* circled over Bao-Bolon wetland reserve, North Bank Division, on 30 November (CB, DG, BM).

Three Sun Larks *Galerida modesta*, including one in aerial display, were at Tanu, Central River Division, on 6 December (CB, DG, BM); this species was previously known only from a few sites on the north bank in Upper River Division and has recently been discovered south-east of Basse, near Sabi (KR). Eight Plain Martins *Riparia paludicola* were with Common Sand Martins *R. riparia* at Kwinella, Lower River Division, on 8 December; a rarely recorded species in The Gambia (CB, DG, BM). At Prufu Swamp, Upper River Division, two Orphean Warblers *Sylvia hortensis* were found on 4 December (CB, DG, BM, KR); this species is new for Upper River Division, most records coming from coastal areas. In November, House Buntings *Emberiza striolata* were observed at Kaiaf, Lower River Division (a female on 1st; per CB), Tendaba, Western Division (a pair) and Bansang

Quarry, Central River Division (three) (VA); the only previous recent record was that of a male near Belel, Central River Division, in December 2002 (CB).

Ghana

Noteworthy records from March 2004 include Yellow-footed Honeyguide *Melignomon eisentrauti*, seen on four occasions at various sites in Kakum National Park, on 12–15th, and Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, found at Tono Dam on 20th (DH). In July, the first Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* for Ghana, a female in almost full breeding condition, was found at the Sakumo Lagoon, near Accra, on 22nd (AH).

A visit to the proposed Kyabobo National Park, on the Togo border, in July 2004 produced many interesting records, amongst which over 50 (near-) endemic Guineo-Congolian forest species, which at 08°20–08°30'N all represent northward range extensions. These included White-crested Tiger Heron *Tigriornis leucolopha*, Cassin's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus africanus*, Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis* (adult feeding a fledgling), Sharpe's Apalis *Apalis sharpii*, White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens*, Shrike Flycatcher *Megabyas flammulatus* and Puvél's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puvéli*. The Data Deficient Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni* was found commonly in large forest clearings and especially in farmbrush; it appeared remarkably tolerant of the invasive exotic *Chromolaena odorata* and one singing male was even observed in a field of maize. Also of interest were Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti* (one in song near Koue; only the fourth locality for Ghana), several African Barred Owlets *Glaucidium capense* heard in forest in several locations (a new species for Ghana, but to be expected), and Black-shouldered Nightjars *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis* (the first record of this species away from the coast and the first tape-recorded proof for Ghana) (FD-L & RJD).

A month-long visit to Mole National Park in August–September 2004 also produced a new species for the country—**Horus Swift** *Apus horus*, a considerable extension west—and yet another record of **Black-shouldered Nightjar**. Other species of interest included **Red-chested Cuckoo** *Cuculus solitarius* (common, and yet these are the first records north of the forest zone), **Thick-billed Cuckoo** (fifth locality), **Yellowbill** *Ceuthmochares aereus* (local; northward extension), **Narina's Trogon** *Apaloderma narina* (five localities; the first records north of the forest zone), **African Quailfinch** *Ortygospiza atricollis* (small southward extension). Of nine *Cisticola* species, **Rufous Cisticola** *C. rufus* was common throughout dry woodland, whereas **Dorst's Cisticola** *C. dorsti* was locally common in open, short woodland especially in water-logged areas. **Yellow-breasted Apalis** *Apalis flavida* was confirmed as quite common in all riparian forest and thicket (contra Grimes 1987, *Birds of Ghana*). **Forbes's Plovers** *Charadrius forbesi* and **Sun Larks** *Galerida modesta* were common on laterite bowls; the latter had previously been confused with **Crested Lark** *G. cristata* (which thus does not occur in Ghana). **Black-headed Weavers** *Ploceus melanocephalus* were found at three localities; there is only one previous record, and this is the only known site in Ghana. Small groups of displaying **Barka Indigobirds** *Vidua larvaticola* imitating **Black-faced Firefinch** *Lagonosticta larvata* were found in three places; **Wilson's Indigobirds** *V. wilsoni* were associating with **Bar-breasted Firefinches** *L. rufopicta* at Mognori, and a group of displaying **Cameroon Indigobirds** *V. camerunensis* imitating **Black-bellied Firefinch** *L. rara* were found near Kananto. **Exclamatory Paradise Whydah** *Vidua interjecta* and its host **Red-winged Pytilia** *Pytilia phoenicoptera* were quite widespread; whereas only one **Togo Paradise Whydah** *V. togoensis* and one **Yellow-winged Pytilia** *P. hypogrammica*, its host, were recorded (FD-L & RJD).

Guinea

Surveys carried out in November–December 2003 in Déré, Diécké and Mont Béro Forest Reserves, in the extreme south-east, produced ten additions to the country list: **Sandy Scops Owl** *Otus icterorhynchus*, **Red-chested Owlet** *Glaucoedon tephronotum*, **Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill** *Bycanistes subcylindricus* (at all three sites), **Bristle-nosed Barbet** *Gymnobucco peli*, **Rufous-sided Broadbill** *Smithornis rufolateralis* (at all three sites), **Grey-throated Flycatcher** *Myioparus griseigularis*, **Bioko Batis** *Batis poensis*, **Tiny Sunbird** *Cinnyris minullus*, **Narrow-tailed Starling** *Poepoptera lugubris* and, most importantly, the **Endangered Gola Malimbe** *Malimbus ballmanni*, which appeared to be relatively common in mixed bird parties in Diécké forest (RD & HR).

A belated report of **Sierra Leone Prinia** *Schistolais leontica*, observed near Dalaba in early 2001 (PC), confirms the occurrence of the species in the area, where it was first discovered in October 1999 (*Bull. ABC* 11: 73).

Kenya

Noteworthy records from Ngulia in November–December 2003 include the following. On 26 November c.430 migrating **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis* were counted in c.1 hour,



Sierra Leone Prinia *Schistolais leontica* by Mark Andrews

together with at least one **Eurasian Hobby** *F. subbuteo* and more than 140 **Eurasian Rollers** *Coracias garrulus*. Another 110 **Amur Falcons** passed over on 3 December. Other raptors moving through during the same period included **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* (three, 15–20 November), **Steppe Eagle** *A. nipalensis* (a trickle most days), **Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus* (at least three in late November, both pale and dark morphs) and **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* (several). Singles of the following species were ringed: **Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistris* (4 December; first for Ngulia), **European Scops Owl** *Otus scops* (26 November), **Nubian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus nubicus* (28 December), **Mangrove Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegaloides* (1 December; first for Ngulia) and **Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* (1 December; second for Ngulia). Three **Marsh Warblers** *Acrocephalus palustris* had rings from the Czech Republic, Germany and Sweden. A **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*, heard singing in front of the lodge on 26 November, was the second for Ngulia (the first was ringed in 1988). Three **Grey-headed Silverbills** *Odontospiza griseicapilla*, ringed on 1 December, were the first in 35 years of ringing (CJ).

The following records from 28–30 January 2004 are new for the extreme north-west. On or near waterholes in the Lodwar area: **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (one), **Green-backed Heron** *Butorides striatus* (two), **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* (five), **Senegal Thick-knee** *Burhinus senegalensis* (a pair), **Malachite Kingfisher** *Alcedo cristata* (one), **Plain Martin** *Hirundo paludicola* (a few above the Lotikip plains and near the Oropoi junction), **House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* (c.20 birds above Oropoi) and **Upcher's Warbler** *Hippolais languida* (one). Near Lokochokio: a male **Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* and a pair of **Pied Crows** *Corvus albus* (CJ).

Madagascar

In October 2003, 23 **Madagascar**

White Ibises *Threskiornis (aethiopicus) bernieri* and 34 **Madagascar Teals** *Anas bernieri* were seen at the Betsiboka Delta, south of Mahajanga, on 7th. On 27th, 36 **Madagascar Teal** were counted at the same site. A **Madagascar Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter madagascariensis* was seen at Analamazaotra ('Périnet') Special Reserve on 10th, and another was observed for an extended period at Berenty Private Reserve on 14th. A male of the seldom-seen **Slender-billed Flufftail** *Sarothrura watersi* was found at Anjozorobe marsh on 12th (DH).

Madeira

In late July 2004, 1,729 **Bulwer's Petrels** *Bulweria bulwerii* were counted in one evening at Ponta da Cruz. A **White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina* and a **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* were seen a few miles south of Madeira on 8 July. If accepted, a **White-rumped Swift** *Apus caffer* at Funchal on 29 June will be the first for Madeira (per *Birding World* 17: 282; per *Dutch Birding* 26: 333–343).

Mali

A five-week expedition, from 21 May to 23 June 2004, mainly prospected the poorly known south and south-west. Additions to the country list were **Forbes's Plover** *Charadrius forbesi* (one on a laterite pan near Sagabari), **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* (heard near Madina Diassa and Farako, near Sikasso), **Golden-rumped Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus bilineatus* (heard at the Woroni waterfalls, south of Sikasso) and **Spotted Creeper** *Salpornis spilonotus* (seen near Kalana, south of Yanfolila).

Very few species of Guineo-Congolian rainforest were found at all, and then only in the far south, i.e. **Green Turaco** *Tauraco persa* and **White-bellied Kingfisher** *Alcedo leucogaster* in the Farako gallery and, most surprisingly, a pair of **Buff-spotted Woodpeckers** *Campethera nivosa* in the wide gallery on the Baoulé-sud near Madina Diassa. A number of species characteristic of dry gallery

forest elsewhere appear far more widespread in Mali than hitherto known, including **African Finfoot** *Podica senegalensis*, **Narina's Trogon** *Apaloderma narina* and **Adamawa Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia hypopyrrha* (the last two discovered as recently as in 2002, cf. *Bull. ABC* 9: 146–147), **Blue-breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon malimbica*, **Oriole Warbler** *Hypergerus atriceps* and **Yellow-breasted Apalis** *Apalis flavida*. **White-backed Night Herons** *Gorsachius leucanotus* were seen and heard at three sites (Kouoro bridge on the Banifing, east and south of Kangaba). A group of 7–8 **Magpie Mannikins** *Spermestes fringilloides* was feeding on the seeds of the wild bamboo *Oxytenanthera abyssinica* south of Sagabari; the ecology of this species has not been studied in West Africa, but in south-eastern Africa it is well known to feed almost exclusively on bamboo seeds. A **Dorst's Cisticola** *Cisticola dorsti* was in full song in open woodland near Kalana, next to a pair of **Red-winged Warblers** *Heliolais erythroptera*; the latter species is rare in Mali. **Whistling Cisticola** *Cisticola lateralis*, almost unrecorded in Mali, was found commonly in the far south-west (Madina Diassa and Nalla) north to the Baoulé crossing west of Négala. Near Madina Diassa

still, single pairs of **Mottled Spinetails** *Telacanthura ussheri* and **Pied-winged Swallows** *Hirundo leucosoma* were breeding in the same baobab, albeit using different entry holes. The extensive grass plains of the south-west (Ouassoulou Balé, Fié rivers) were home to substantial populations of **Croaking Cisticola** *Cisticola natalensis*, **Black-backed Cisticola** *C. eximius*, **Zebra Waxbill** *Sporaeoginthus subflavus* and other grassland specialists like **Swamp Nightjar** *Caprimulgus natalensis* for which there are few records in Mali. The little-known **Mali** (Kulikoro) **Firefinch** *Lagonosticta virata* was found to be particularly common in dry thicket on the large rocky mountain north-west of Kita, and was also noted near Siby and in Bamako Botanic Gardens.

A five-day tour in the Sahel, from Douentza to Gao, on 14–19 June, produced many records of interest. **Desert Eagle Owls** *Bubo (bubo) ascalaphus* were heard at the cliffs near Douentza and Hombori (a significant south-westward range extension) and a pair was seen on a small rocky escarpment 6 km east of Gao. **Golden Nightjars** *Caprimulgus eximius* were found closely associated with rocky hills, from Douentza to Gao; their churring song was tape-recorded and positively identified for the first time, as dawn playback brought the birds into view within 6–10 m of observers until it was almost full daylight. Hundreds of **Pallid Apus** *Apus pallidus* and **Mottled Swifts** *Tachymartus aequatorialis* were feeding noisily around all large cliffs from Douentza to Hombori and also came to drink in pools a long way from water, as in the Gourma. Several **Kordofan Larks** *Mirafra cordofanica* were in song in sand dunes south-west of Gao, where the spiky grass *Schoenefeldia gracilis* was dominant. Species of interest in the Gourma, between Douentza and Benzéma, included **Quail-plover** *Ortyxelos meiffrenii* and **Fulvous Babblers** *Turdoides fulvus*; the latter was, as expected, far more common in arid woodland near Gao. A **River Prinia** *Prinia fluviatilis* was seen at Gao on



Desert Eagle Owl *Bubo (bubo) ascalaphus* by Mark Andrews

the edge of the Niger; this constitutes only the second record for the country. An **Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida* seen as late as 17 June, in an *Acacia* hedge in Gao, might belong to the Afrotropical population from Nigeria/Niger not yet proven to breed in Mali (RJD & FD-L).

Mauritania

In November 2004, 30 **Dunn's Larks** *Eremalauda dunni* were seen north of Nouakchott on 26th and six on 29th. A small colony of c.30 **Rock Martins** *Hirundo fuligula* was found on cliffs north of Iwik, Banc d'Arguin National Park, on 26th. Six **Desert Sparrows** *Passer simplex* were in the small hamlet at the Ten Alloul turn off of the Nouadhibou road on 29th and a single male was seen further south, c.100 km north of Nouakchott, on the same day (RC).

Morocco

On 16 August 2004, a massive movement of 38,000 **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* took place across the Strait of Gibraltar, from Spain to Morocco (per *Dutch Birding* 26: 339). A first-winter **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* was reported from Oued Massa on 2 November; this would be the first for Morocco, if accepted (per *Birding World* 17: 465). A **Hooded Crow** *Corvus (corone) cornix*, at Oued Smir lagoon, just south of Ceuta on the Mediterranean coast, on 22 October, may constitute the second for Morocco, following a report pending for 2003 (per *Birding World* 17: 414).

Namibia

Records from Walvis Bay on 10–11 November 2004 include a **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Himantopus ostralegus*, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*, two **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa*, six **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* and, rarest of all, a **Wilson's Phalarope** *P. tricolor* (KW; per TH). A pair of **Shelley's Sunbirds** *Cinnyris shelleyi* was sighted regularly at Kalizo Lodge on the Zambezi, in the Caprivi Strip, in September 2004 (DS & NP per AG); this species is very rarely observed in southern Africa.



Locust Finch *Paludipasser locustella*
by Mark Andrews

Nigeria

Despite not having been seen in 2003, **Locust Finches** *Paludipasser locustella* reappeared in 2004 at Rock Water Fish Farm on the Jos Plateau in central Nigeria. This suggests that their occurrence there in 2002 was part of a western range expansion rather than a case of vagrancy (RM).

São Tomé & Príncipe

A **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* was seen well in the garden of Bom Bom Island Resort, Príncipe, after a heavy thunderstorm, on 21 September 2004; this apparently is the first record for the island: the only previous sighting is of several birds on board a ship between São Tomé and Príncipe in March 1992. Also in September, a **São Tomé Grosbeak** *Neospiza concolor* responded to playback by coming straight in, whistling loudly, in São Tomé's south-west corner (NB).

Senegal

Records from 1–8 December 2004 in the extreme north-west include two **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* in Ndiaël Faunal Reserve on 4th and five in Djoudj National Park on 7th. At least ten **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* were in the Djoudj on 3rd. Birdlife appeared quite different from

previous years: several normally common species were scarce (with White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* conspicuously absent), whilst a few others were encountered for the first time. Up to three **Bearded Barbets** *Lybius dubius* were seen daily near Bango village, St Louis, during the first week of December; this is a significant northward range extension. Four **Kordofan Larks** *Mirafra kordofanica* were found in Ndiaël on 4th and three **Cricketer Warblers** *Spiloptila clamans* near Marigot Two on 2nd (RC).

Seychelles

Recent records received by Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) include the first **Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicednemus* for Seychelles found at Bird Island on 24 October–14 November 2004. A **Pterodroma** at Cousin Island on 29 August 2003 and, possibly the same individual, on 29 June 2004 was either a **Herald Petrel** *P. arminjoniana* or a **Kermadec Petrel** *P. neglecta*. Evidence, including photos, a full set of morphometrics and a blood sample, is being examined by SBRC; neither species has previously been recorded in Seychelles.

Second reports for Seychelles in 2004 include a **White-cheeked Tern** *Sterna repressa* at Providence, Mahé, on 20 November, a **Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* at Bird Island on 10 October (Fig. 1), a **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* at Bird Island on 20 November and a **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* also there on 17–20 March. A late report was received of a **Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* at Anse aux Pins, Mahé, on 13 December 2002, together with a more recent one from Providence, Mahé, on 20 November 2004; there is only one previous accepted record for Seychelles (AS).

Other reports of interest, from the period March–December 2004, include a **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* at Aride on 30 October (DE, FH; Fig. 2), two **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis* at Bird Island on 3 December (Fig. 3), a **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

at Aride on 28 April (Fig. 4) and one at La Passe, Silhouette, on 16–28 June, an adult and first-winter **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* at Oceangate mudflats, Mahé, on 1–18 November, an adult **Oriental Pratincole** *G. maldivarum* at Bird Island on 21–22 March, a **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* at Bird Island on 14 November, a **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* at Bird Island on 3–4 October, a **Jacobin Cuckoo** *Oxylophus jacobinus* at Bird Island on 8 March and a **Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* also there on 12 March (AS).

Socotra

A visit in February 2004 produced the following significant records: an immature **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* on 6th (first record), two **Cotton Teals** *Nettapus coromandelianus* on 6–27th (second record), three **Common Pochards** *Aythya ferina* on 13th (third record), a **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* on 12th (second record), a **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* on 6–27th (second record), three **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinereus* on 13th (second record), single **Jack Snipes** *Lymnocyptes minimus* on 18–19th and 21st–25th, and two male **Common Koels** *Eudynamis scolopaceus* on 7th and a female on 8–12th (first records for Yemen). A new site was discovered for **Socotra Cisticola** *Cisticola haesitata* with a population of over 1,000 birds and two new sites for **Socotra Bunting** *Emberiza socotrana* were also found (RP per *Sandgrouse* 26: 168).

Somalia

Three new species were added to the national list in October 2002: **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug*, **Temminck's Courser** *Cursorius temminckii* and **Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica*. **Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* was found to be resident in the north-west for the first time (JA, JM, GN).

In 2004, two adults and an immature **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio* were observed in a swamp bordering the Shabeelle River near

Qoryooley in April; this is the second record for Somalia and the first in the south. **Temminck's Courser** and **Black-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus melanopterus* were found breeding in the north-west in June. **Collared Lark** *Mirafra collaris* was seen at Yasooman in March (JM).

South Africa

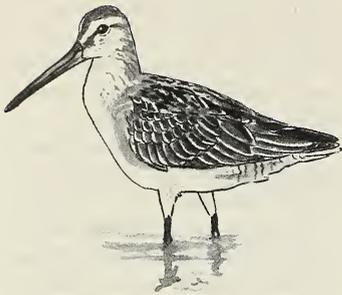
The following records were reported in July–December 2004. On pelagic trips out of Cape Town, single **Northern Royal Albatrosses** *Diomedea (epomophora) sanfordi* were seen on 21–22 August and 19 and 25 September, a **Southern Royal Albatross** *D. (e.) epomophora* on 14 November, and **Wandering Albatrosses** *D. exulans* on 19 and 25 September (three), and on 17 October (AG, TH). A tropicbird *Phaethon* sp. with a red bill, Red-tailed *P. rubricauda* or Red-billed *P. aethereus*, was seen flying over the Cape Point car park on 29 July (GC per CC). A flight in a small aircraft over the Mozambique Channel on 22 October produced at least three **Audubon's Shearwaters** *Puffinus lherminieri*, a **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*, an unidentified **frigatebird** *Fregata* sp. and many **Sooty Terns** *Sterna fuscata* (per TH). An **Atlantic Petrel** *Pterodroma incerta* was identified c.10 km off Cape Point on 2 November (RWa per CC). A **Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii* observed in a large flock of Leach's **Storm-petrels** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* at 35°24'S 11°08'E on 11 December may well constitute the most southerly record yet (CD & PR).

A **Slaty Egret** *Egretta vinaceigula* was seen at Marievale Bird Sanctuary, Gauteng, on 9 October; this bird has been returning regularly to this site (DD per TH). The long-staying **Little Blue Heron** *E. caerulea* was still present at Olifants River mouth, near Papendorp, Western Cape, in August; this bird, the third for southern Africa, was first reported here on 10 November 2001 (KS). **Tufted Ducks** *Aythya fuligula* have been reported occasionally from the south-west Cape in recent years and are presumed escapes, although they may

perhaps constitute genuine vagrants. Fresh reports include at least one in De Hoop Vlei, in mid-July (RW per CC), a male at Rondevlei on 1 August (IM per CC) and another male at Strandfontein on 29 November (JG) and mid-December (DHa). An immature **American Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio martinica* was near Port Edward, KwaZulu-Natal, on 26 October until at least 20 November (HK per TH).

Single **Eurasian Oystercatchers** *Himantopus ostralegus* were reported from Western Cape on 2 September at Sedgfield (GR & EB per TH) and on 2 October at Yzerfontein (BK per TH). **Lesser Sand Plovers** *Charadrius mongolus* were seen in West Coast National Park, Western Cape, on 30 August (three; JG) and 12 September (two; TH), whilst **Greater Sand Plovers** *C. leschenaultii* were observed near Churchhaven, Western Cape, on 25 July (one; DHR), at Geelbek, West Coast National Park, Western Cape, on 30 August (at least five; TH, JG), and at Gamtoos Estuary, near Jeffrey's Bay, Eastern Cape, on 7 October (two; PW). Six **Caspian Plovers** *C. asiaticus* at Greater St Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal, on 21 September, were far to the south-east of their normal range (ID). An **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* was at De Mond, near Bredasdorp, Western Cape, on 27 November until at least 17 December (JH, TH). Single **Pacific Golden Plovers** *P. fulva* were present at Muzi Pan, KwaZulu-Natal, on 4 October (DH) and at Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, on 20 November until at least 6 December (ASu).

In Western Cape, a **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* stayed at Geelbek, West Coast National Park, from 28 August (MT) until 4 October, whereas a **Baird's Sandpiper** *C. bairdii*, found at Velddrif, on 22 October, was searched for in vain next day (TH & MG); both appear to be 11th records for southern Africa. Single **Pectoral Sandpipers** *C. melanotos* were reported from Elandsvlei, Gauteng, on 3–8 September (PW per TH) and from Josini dam, northern KwaZulu-Natal,



Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* by Mark Andrews

on 11 October (PCo, PW). A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* stayed at Gamtoos River mouth, near Jeffrey's Bay, Eastern Cape, from 26 September until at least 7 October (GL), and another was seen in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, on 20 November (ASu).

The second **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* for Africa was discovered at Leeupan, south of Benoni, Johannesburg, on 12 November and remained until 30 November at least; the first was at Nakuru, Kenya, on 20–21 November 1966 (DD, RMo, TH et al.). A **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* was reported from Uilenkraals River mouth, near Gansbaai, Western Cape, on 24 November (AO per TH), and four were at Strandfontein Sewage Works, Western Cape, on 27–29 November (PCo, MD, JG). Single **Common Redshanks** *Tringa totanus* were at Josini dam, northern KwaZulu-Natal, on 12 October (per TH), at Velddrif, Western Cape, on 23 October (per TH), and at Geelbek, West Coast National Park, Western Cape, on 21 November until at least 25th (TH, PCo). A **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* was at Darvill Bird Sanctuary, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, on 11–15 November (DSh; per TH). Near Velddrif, Western Cape, a Red-

necked **Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* was seen on 11 September (TH & MG) and four were present on 25 November (PCo). A **Red (Grey) Phalarope** *P. fulicarius* was seen on a pelagic trip out of Cape Town on 17 October (per TH).

Several **Common Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ridibundus* were reported. An adult in breeding plumage was at the Bot Rivier lagoon, near Hermanus, Western Cape, from 24 July until at least 7 October (MD, HL et al.). Another was observed at King's Beach, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, on 30 August (PP per TH) and probably the same individual was reported from Driftsands Reclamation Works, Port Elizabeth, on 27 October (RF per TH). A first-summer **Common Black-headed Gull** was present at Paarl Bird Sanctuary, Western Cape, on 9 October until at least 13 October (RG, TH, NP). Another adult was at Umgeni River mouth, near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, on 7 November (DSh per TH) and yet another in breeding plumage was photographed at Summerstrand beach, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, on 20 November (per TH).

A **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* was at Nyamithi Pan at Ndumo, KwaZulu-Natal, in late November (CV, TH). The long-staying **Bridled Tern** *Sterna anaethetus* was again present at Cape Recife, Port Elizabeth, on 23 July (LJ, RPa, PW). Nine **Sooty Terns** *S. fuscata* were seen on a pelagic trip out of Richards Bay, on 23 September (per TH), and an adult and a juvenile at Swartvlei, near Wilderness, Western Cape, on 15 November (JF). A **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* was found in a flock of White-winged Terns *C. leucopterus* near Velddrif, Western Cape, on 11 September (TH & MG). An **African Skimmer** *Rynchops flavirostris* stayed at Roodekoppies Dam, near Brits, North-west Province, on 13–19 August (EL per TH).

A **Red-billed Oxpecker** *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* was in the Blaauwberg Conservation Area, Western Cape, on 1 October (CD per TH). In Tokai, Cape Peninsula, Western Cape, a pair of **Amethyst**

(Black) **Sunbirds** *Chalcomitra amethystina* in full breeding plumage was observed on 27 October; their behaviour suggested they were breeding in the area (CS). This species seems to be expanding westwards, and there are previous reports from Tokai gardens (CC). Also in Western Cape, **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows** *Passer diffusus* were reported from Gordon's Bay on 29 August (one; HL) and Somerset West, from 25 July until the end of August at least (JC). A small group of **Red-throated Twinspots** *Hypargos niveoguttatus* was observed in detail at Gundani, Venda, Limpopo Province, in early December. Although there are some old records from this area, the *Atlas of Southern African Birds* (1997) and some subsequent publications have assumed that these were based on misidentifications of Pink-throated Twinspot (DSw per EM).

Tanzania

An adult **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* was seen east of Mkumbale, between Mombo and Same, in the north-east, on 7 November 2003 (BO).

Tunisia

On 17 October 2004, 2,300 **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* and 652 **Marbled Ducks** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* were counted at Barrage Oued Rmal, and 30 **White-headed Ducks** *Oxyura leucocephala* at Barrage Sidi Jdid (HA).

Uganda

Records from 2004 include the following. A **Black Heron** *Egretta ardesiaca* was seen on the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park (=NP) on 28 January; this is a rarely seen species in Uganda (DH). Another egret seen there on 17 August appeared to show characteristics of **Western Reef Egret** *Egretta gularis* (identified at this site in 2003), but was quite distant and the bill appeared too dark and more like that of *E. garzetta*. An individual seen well during a Lake Mburo boat trip on 26 August, however, had the greenish legs and pale bill typical of the race *asha*; this species is a rare vagrant to

Uganda. A snake eagle with a greyish head, whitish throat, broken breast-band and plain white underwing-coverts was identified as an adult male **Beaudouin's Snake Eagle** *Circaetus beaudouini* in the Ishasha sector of Queen Elizabeth NP on 18 August; this is a vagrant to western Uganda (NB). Another vagrant in the same park was a **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei*, seen on the Kazinga Channel on 28 January (DH). A **Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo** *Cuculus rochii* was captured on video along the 'Royal Mile' in Budongo Forest on 13 August; this migrant is rarely recorded in East Africa and there are apparently no official records from Budongo, although a local guide claimed that the species was also present in 2003. A **Speckle-breasted Woodpecker** *Dendropicos poecilolaemus* was found at Buhoma on 21 August; this may be the first for the area (NB).

A displaying **Little Rush Warbler** *Bradypterus baboecala* was observed in Murchison Falls NP on 9 August; this appears to be a new record for the park, although the local guide was familiar with the species (NB). Three **Southern Black Flycatchers** *Melaenornis pammelaina* were seen in Lake Mburo NP on 5 February; this may represent the third record for Uganda (DH). The long-staying **Yellow-footed Flycatcher** *Muscicapa sethsmithi* at Buhoma, Bwindi Impenetrable NP, first recorded in the park in 2002, is not the only Ugandan record away from Budongo Forest, as erroneously stated in last Recent Reports (Bull. ABC 11: 182); an individual was observed in Semliki NP on 7 July 2001 (Bull. ABC 9: 72) (GM). There are now apparently several pairs in Bwindi (NB). A male **Red-eyed Puffback** *Dryoscopus senegalensis* was claimed from the Neck, Bwindi Impenetrable NP; this is an easterly range extension, as Semliki, on the border of the DR Congo, is the only other site in Uganda from where the species is known. A small breeding population of c.20 **Northern Masked Weavers** *Ploceus taeniopterus* was found on the shores of Lake Bunyoni on 5 February (DH).

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's second **Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* was found by the Nyamatusi channel, downstream of Nyamepi Camp, Mana Pools National Park, on 30 September 2004 and stayed until at least 18 November (JV & TW per TH). The first was seen earlier in the year in Hwange National Park (Bull. ABC 11: 182).

Records were collated by Ron Demey from contributions supplied by John Ash (JA), Vaughan Ashby (VA), Hichem Azafzaf (HA), Clive Barlow (CB), Eric Barnes (EB), Peter Bijlmakers (PB), Nik Borrow/Birdquest (NB), Ammar Boumezbeur (AB), Paul Cardy (PC), John Carter (JC), Bouzid Chalabi (BC), Tony Clarke (TC), Philip Coetzee (PCo), Callan Cohen (CC), Tom Coles (TCo), Geoff Crane (GC), Richard Cruse (RC), Ian Davidson (ID), Dave Deighton (DD), Mariana Delpont (MD), Ron Demey (RD), Cliff Dorse (CD), Robert J. Dowsett (RJD), Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire (FD-L), D. Evans (DE), John Fannin (JF), Ron Field (RF), Daphne Gemmill (DG), Margaret Gibbs (MG), John Graham (JG), Richard Grant (RG), Anne Gray (AG), David Hall (DHa), Trevor Hardaker (TH), Doug Harebottle (DHR), Jens Hering (JH), Andrew Hester (AH), Harold Hester (HH), F. Hobro (FH), David Hoddinotti/Rockjumper Birding Tours (DH), Linda Jones (LJ), Herman Kleynhans (HK), Brigid de Kock (BK), Hanno Langenhoven (HL), Marc Languy (ML), Geoff Lockwood (GL), Elsa Lourens (EL), Etienne Marais (EM), Ross McGregor (RM), Ian Meacheran (IM), John Miskell (JM), Aïssa Moali (AM), Richard Montinaro (RMO), Bill Mueller (BM), Giles Mulholland (GM), Gerhard Nikolaus (GN), Kevin Yana Njabo (KYN), Anton Odendaal (AO), Bernard Oosterbaan (BO), Russell Paton (RPa), Phil Penlington (PP), Richard Porter (RP), Naas du Preez (NP), Hugo Rainey (HR), George Reid (GR), Richard Rendall (RR), Kev Roy (KR), Peter Ryan (PR), David Shackelford (DSH), Kevin Shaw (KS), Roger Skeen

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Contributions for Recent Reports can be sent to Ron Demey, Van der Heimstraat 52, 2582 SB Den Haag, Netherlands, and also by e-mail: rondemey@compuserve.com.

Reviews



State of the World's Birds 2004: Indicators for our Changing World

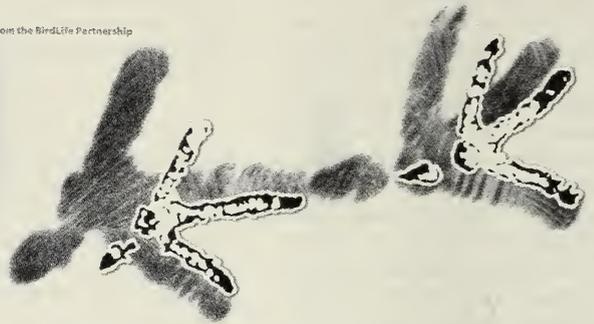
BirdLife International, 2004. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. (Printed version available UK£9 from NHBS, but also available for free download from www.birdlife.org.)

This report is the first to summarise in one place the current state of the world's birds, the pressures facing them and some of the conservation community's responses. As such it is in effect a 'Red Book' for the state of the planet using the best known group of animals, i.e. birds, as examples to show both what has happened, what is still happening and what we are starting (but only starting) to do about it.

Each double-page spread is complete in itself and summarises the information on a particular topic. For example the 'Current State' section includes pages on Common species in decline, Declines can be quick and catastrophic, Threatened species occur world-wide, and Many have small ranges; the 'Pressure' section includes Expanding agriculture destroys, Unsustainable forestry is eroding biodiversity, Pollution, Overexploitation and Climate change; and the 'Response' section such as Actions have been identified for all Globally Threatened species, Important Bird Areas safeguard areas, and Wider landscape is important too. All are spelt out using particular examples and are well illustrated with photographs and relevant diagrams, many taken from very recent sources, and they include new analyses where necessary.

There is no doubt that this is an important document which needs to be read and acted upon. We as bird-watchers and conservationists will agree with all of it and many of the

An assessment from the BirdLife Partnership



STATE OF THE WORLD'S BIRDS 2004

Indicators for our changing world



principles will be very well known to many of us, as will many of the specific examples quoted; and it is certainly handy to have a summary of all the main factors affecting birds in one place. However, it is politicians and other policy makers who really need to be targeted with it. In many cases it will be fine for them too, but there will be instances where even if the problem is worldwide all the illustrations for a problem are from one part of the world and politicians in another could say 'that does not apply to us'. To take just one example the Unsustainable forestry pages refer almost exclusively to south-east Asia, particularly Indonesia, with no mention of Africa and only a very brief mention of South America. There is no obvious way around this except by producing several documents with relevant, more local examples. For some topics I suspect this will be a good idea and at least in the worldwide web version it would be feasible without a huge extra cost.

At £9 it is good value for 72 A4-size landscape pages but you can, if you prefer, see and download rele-

vant (or all) pages from the BirdLife website (c.15 MB) for free, a very laudable initiative.

Peter Lack

Seabirds: A Natural History

Anthony J. Gaston, 2004. London, UK: T. & A. D. Poyser. 222pp, 22 colour plates, numerous maps, tables, figures, line drawings and black-and-white photographs. Hardback. ISBN 0 7136 6557 2. UK£35.

Whilst ten species of seabird flurry about their business and Minke Whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* breach, I try to concentrate on writing this review off north-west Scotland. The review grinds to a halt as a whale dives beneath our boat, its streamlined shape visible in the clear, clear waters of the Minch. I think Tony Gaston would forgive my lapse for he weaves many similar moments from the 30-odd years of his seabird past into the narrative of his book. That said the book is not a compilation of anecdotes from salt-sprayed corners of the globe.

Rather, it is an attempt to pull together and then explain unifying

features of seabird biology. Here is a sample of the questions tackled. Why are there so few small seabird species (<20 g) when most landbirds are of this size? Why are seabird wings the shape they are? (One of the most interesting sections.) Why do seabirds not eat jellyfish? (Easy: they neither taste nice nor provide much nourishment.) Why do seabirds lay such small clutches? (David Lack foreshadowed most of the answers.)

Thus the coverage is wide and generally illuminating. It is, almost inevitably given Tony Gaston's track record, biased towards auks, with Africa receiving scant mention. There remain intriguing puzzles such as why it should be male murrets that generally accompany the chick to sea. And some statements such as 'age at first breeding appears to be determined by adult mortality' beg for more explanation.

Of course in such a wonderfully wide-ranging book there are mistakes. The Faroese and the Italians, to name but two, might contest the British endemicity of the British Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. And I fear there is a risk that the book will be perceived as falling between the two stools occupied by the heavyweight academic and the reader who enjoys Ronald Lockley's undemanding prose. But please run the risk whatever your preferred stool. *Seabirds* offers much entertaining instruction, distilled from what

is, in effect, an overview of Tony Gaston's working life.

Michael Brooke

Status survey and conservation action plan for the Black Crowned Crane *Balearica pavonina*

Emmanuel Williams, Richard Beilfuss and Tim Dodman, 2003. Dakar, Senegal: Wetlands International & Baraboo, Wisconsin, USA: International Crane Foundation. 80 pp. ISBN 910-5882-9758. Available from Natural History Book Service, www.nhbs.co.uk

In 1999, the International Crane Foundation and Wetlands International launched the Black Crowned Crane Programme to identify key areas where effective projects could be established for the conservation of Black Crowned Cranes *Balearica pavonina* and their habitats. The species was formerly abundant and widely distributed across at least 27 African countries, but during the past 30 years it has been decreasing in much of its range. In 2000–01 the first-ever, range-wide surveys of the species were organised at 187 target sites in 20 countries. The results are presented in this well-produced report. The total Black Crowned Crane population was estimated at 42,000, which is significantly lower than the previous (1994) estimate of 65,500–77,500. The West African subspecies *B. p. pavonina* numbers c.14,500 birds and is in overall decline, but appears to be stable in freshwater wetlands of the Casamance (southern Senegal) and Guinea-



Bissau, and in the Chad Basin. The East African population *B. p. ceciliae*, numbering c.27,500 birds, is also declining, but remains relatively common in southern Sudan. As principal threats facing the Black Crowned Crane, the report mentions the conversion and over-exploitation of wetlands, egg removal and nest disturbance, and the live crane trade and domestication. Drought and desertification are also considered important threats, especially in combination with other factors. The report provides eight pages of recommendations for the conservation of the species as a whole and for each of the two subspecies.

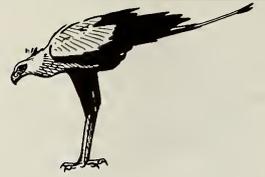
Ron Demey

SEABIRDS A NATURAL HISTORY



ANTHONY J. GASTON

Letters to the Editor



On Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana* 'flapping' display

In their most interesting paper on the birds of Pic de Fon in Guinea, Demey & Rainey (2004) described a displaying male of Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana* (race *henrici*) 'jumping up vertically c.80 cm off the ground with rattling wings'. They believe this behaviour had not been described previously in the species, citing in support (among others) Keith *et al.* (1992).

We have come across this wing-noise display in several races of this lark, most notably in the race *nyikae* on the Nyika Plateau, Malaŵi-Zambia, where birds perform such displays quite regularly in the breeding season (observations over our several years of residence there in the 1980s, and also on a shorter visit in November–December 1977). On 5 December 1977, FD-L tape-recorded the noise produced by the wings of a jumping bird, a 'short burst of sound much like that made by the lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*' (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1978: 142). We also mentioned in the same paper that similar 'flapping' behaviour was noticed occasionally by D. R. Aspinwall in individuals of other races on the southern Zambian plateau. In addition RJD (unpubl.) noted it in the montane race *nigrescens* on the Kitulo Plateau of southern Tanzania. The height of the jumps is usually quite short, a few cm to perhaps just under 1 m.

Of *M. africana malbranti* in the Kasai (Congo-Kinshasa), Chapin (1953: 47) wrote: '...Vincent observed the courting flight of a male, shooting up repeatedly from the ground to about 30 feet, where it "burred" with its wings, gave a tri-syllabic whistle, and came gliding down

with wings up-raised and legs out-stretched'. The height of the flapping wing display described by Vincent is much higher than in our experience of the species: in April 1996, on the Téké Plateau of Congo-Brazzaville, FD-L saw at least one lark of the same race *malbranti* display with the usual short vertical jump.

Of southern African birds, Maclean (1993: 427) wrote: '...between every 3–5 phrases, birds raises [*sic*] body on straight legs (or even lifts slightly off perch) as wings rattled, phrrrrp...'. Skead (1995: 464–467) detailed many instances of similar 'clapping' in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, although it is clear that the song was usually not accompanied by wing-snapping. 'Clapping' was usually on the ground or up to 3 m high, but on one occasion the bird flew up in the air to some 15 m 'on slow beating but clapping wings'. Birds at times returned to the ground 'holding the feet hanging below the body'.

To be fair, Keith *et al.* (1992) had referred to this on p.23: 'wings often flapped during song, producing rattled phrrrr'. Demey & Rainey (2004) did not associate this description to what they saw in Guinea because the vertical jump was not mentioned (R. Demey pers. comm.). Nevertheless, with or without a noticeable vertical jump, this type of display seems quite widespread in the species, although it had not previously been reported for West African *henrici*.

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F. Dowsett-Lemaire and R. J. Dowsett, *Le Pouget, 30440 Sumène, France*.
E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com.

On São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*

In 2001, while working for the Bird Group of the Natural History Museum in Tring, I circulated a photograph of what was then believed by me (and others) to be a specimen of São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*. My comments concerning this apparently second known specimen have since entered the literature (Fry & Keith 2004, *The Birds of Africa*. Vol. 7: 530). However, further investigations into this data-less, mounted specimen of rather poor condition, which is housed in the Naturkundemuseum Bamberg (Germany), revealed that those colleagues commenting on the photo, and myself, were mistaken. The specimen has now been identified as being a Black-throated Grosbeak *Saltator (Pitylus) fuliginosus* from Brazil (cf. Dickinson

2003, *Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*: 824). Therefore, still only one specimen of *Neospiza concolor* is extant, housed in the Natural History Museum, Tring, registered BMNH 1891.8.20.14 (cf. Knox & Walters 1994, *Br. Ornithol. Cl. Occ. Publ.* 1:

258). *Neospiza concolor* and *Saltator (Pitylus) fuliginosus* have, in fact, very similar bill shapes (though they differ in colour in live birds) and agree in most body proportions. Currently, they are treated within two different families (Dickinson 2003: 749:

Fringillidae / 824: Cardinalidae). I apologise for any confusion that my earlier comments might have caused.

Frank D. Steinheimer, Sylter Strasse 18, D-90425 Nürnberg, Germany. E-mail franksteinheimer@yahoo.co.uk

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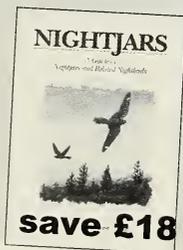
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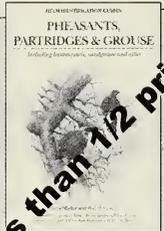
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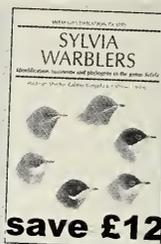
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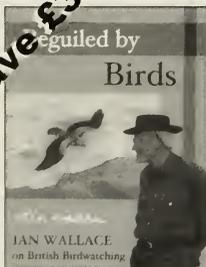
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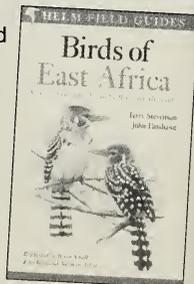
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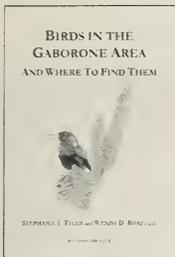
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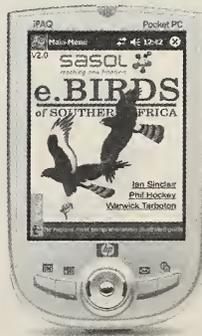
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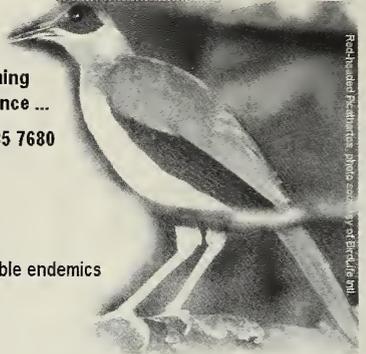
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papers published in English, and vice versa. Those submitting papers should supply a summary for translation into English, or French, as appropriate.

If you submit your contribution on floppy disk, please state computer (eg IBM compatible PC, Macintosh) and word-processing package (eg Word, WordPerfect) used.

When sending your contribution on disk, please do not key anything in ALL CAPS (ie with the CAPS LOCK key depressed) unless the combination always occurs in that form (eg 'USA'). Do not use the carriage return key at the end of lines, and do not right justify the margins. When formatting tables use one tab, and not spaces, between each column. Unless a sketch map is provided as part of the article the names of places should follow those on standard or readily available maps.

Preferred names

With the current instability over worldwide lists of bird names, authors are requested to follow those used in *Birds of Africa* Vols 1-7. The African Bird Club has recently published (www.africanbirdclub.org/resources/checklist.html) a checklist of birds in its region. This is based on *Birds of Africa* but

incorporates more recent revisions where appropriate. It includes preferred scientific, English and French names as well as races and alternatives used by publications widely used in Africa. For bird names this list should be used or at least the preferred name used there should be given as an alternative. For non-*Birds of Africa* species (eg from the Malagasy region) use Dowsett & Forbes-Watson (1993). Deviation from such works should be noted and the reasons given. The Editorial Team will keep abreast of changes in nomenclature and when an agreed list of African names is available, will consider switching to follow it. Unless a sketch map is provided as part of the article, the names of places should, if possible, follow those on standard or readily available maps.

Style

Authors are requested to follow conventions used in *The Bulletin of the African Bird Club* and to refer to a recent issue for guidance. A detailed style guide can be obtained, either electronically or as a hard copy, on request from the Managing Editor.

ABC Representatives

Angola: Pedro de França Doria vaz Pinto, Rua Helder Neto 12, 7oA; Luanda. E-mail: pypinto@clix.pt.
Australia: K. David Bishop, P O Box 6068, Kinchester, NSW 2251. E-mail: kdbishop@ozemail.au.com.
Austria: Graham Tebb, Waagasse 2/39, A-1040 Vienna. E-mail: tebb@vfw.ac.at.
Belgium: Jan Goossens, Vrientebaan 18, 2520 Emblem. Tel/fax: +32 3 488 13 71. E-mail: jan.goossens5@pandora.be.
Botswana: Chris Brewster, PO Box 2316, Gaborone. E-mail: cbrewster@botsnet.bw.
Canada: Antonio Salvadori, 17 Colborn Street, Guelph, Ontario. N1G 2M4. E-mail: rosella@snowwhite.cis.uoguelph.ca.
Canary Islands/Spain: Tony Clarke C/ República Dominicana No. 61, Barrio de Fátima, 38500 Güímar, Tenerife. E-mail: clark@arrakis.es.
Denmark: Uffe Gjøl Sorensen, Ovengaden Oven Vander 68.2, 1415 Copenhagen. E-mail: ugs@post7.tele.dk.
Democratic Republic of Congo: Byamana Robert Kizungu, Head of Ornithology Laboratory, CRSN-Lwiro, DRC, BP02 Cyangugu, Rwanda. E-mail: kbyamana@yahoo.com
Egypt: Sherif & Mindy Baha El Din, 2 Abdalla El Karib St. Apt. 3, Dokki, Cairo. Tel/Fax: 3608160. E-mail: baha@internetegypt.com.
France: Bob & Françoise Dowsett, Le Pouget, Sumène, F30440. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com.
Finland: Annika Forsten, Messeniusgatan 11 B 54, 00250 Helsingfors, Finland. E-mail: annika.forsten@intrum.com.
The Gambia: Solomon Jallow, c/o WABSA, Department of Parks & Wildlife, Management HQ, Abuko Nature Reserve, Abuko, PMB 676 S/K. E-mail: habitatafrica@hotmail.com.
Ghana: Samuel Kofi Nyame, PO Box KIA 30284, Airport, Accra. E-mail: sknyame@sngghana.org.
Italy: Giuseppe Micali, Via Volterra 3, Milano, MI 1-20146. E-mail: xeamy@tin.it.
Kenya: Colin Jackson, PO Box 383, Watamu. E-mail: colin.jackson@bigfoot.com.

Liberia: Moses A Massah, Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia, Monrovia Zoo, PO Box 2628, Monrovia. E-mail: mosesmassah@yahoo.com.
Madagascar: Julien Ramanampomny, Section Oiseaux, PBZT, BP 4096, 101 Antananarivo. E-mail: julien_asity@freenet.mg (mark FAO: Julien Ramanampomny).
Morocco: Jacques Franchimont, Dept Biologie Faculté des Sciences de Meknes, B P 4010, Beni M'Hamed 50003, Meknes. E-mail: j.franchimont@extra.net.ma.
Namibia: Tim Osborne, PO Box 22, Okaukuejo, vis Outjo 9000. E-mail: kori@iafrica.com.na.
Netherlands: Ron Demey, Van der Heimstraat 52, 2582 SB Den Haag, Netherlands. E-mail: rondemey@compuserve.com.
Nigeria: Vincent Chikwendu Ejere, Dept of Zoology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. E-mail: misunn@aol.com.
São Tomé & Príncipe: Angus Gascoigne, CP 289, São Tomé. E-mail: angus@csstome.net.
Seychelles: Adrian Skerrett, Shipping House, PO Box 336, Victoria, Mahé. Fax: 380538. E-mail: maheship@seychelles.net or adrian@skerrett.fsnet.co.uk
South Africa: Steven Evans, 89 Republic Road, Ferndale. E-mail: steven@ewt.org.za.
Swaziland: Dr Ara Monadjem, UNISWA, P/Bag 4, Kwaluseni. E-mail: ara@uniswacc.uniswa.sz.
Tanzania: Maurus Mtsuha, Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute, PO Box 661, Arusha. E-mail: carnivores@habari.co.tz.
Uganda: Prof. Derek Pomeroy, Makerere University Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources, PO Box 7298, Kampala. E-mail: derek@imul.com.
Zimbabwe: The Executive Officer, BirdLife Zimbabwe, PO Box RV100, Runiville, Harare. E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw.

The ABC Representatives scheme aims to support existing members by providing a local point of contact in their region, for example, to answer queries

to the Club, to solicit submissions for the bulletin, and possibly to arrange local meetings for members. Existing ABC members can contact their local Representative in the first instance with queries relating to the Club. ABC Representatives help to recruit new members in their region, for example, by distributing posters and arranging local advertising. In Africa, ABC Representatives help to identify opportunities to invest the ABC Conservation Fund and candidates for the Supported Membership scheme.

The Club aims to appoint many further ABC Representatives. If you are interested in supporting and promoting the Club in your region, have any queries, or require further information relating to the ABC Representatives scheme please do not hesitate to contact the Membership Secretary at the Club address, e-mail membership@africanbirdclub.org.

ABC is seeking Country Representatives in the following countries within the Club's region: Algeria, Ascension, Azores, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde Islands, Central African Republic, Chad, Comores & Mayotte, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Madeira, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Réunion, Rodriguez, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Socotra, Somalia, St Helena, Sudan, Togo, Tristan da Cunha, Tunisia, USA and Zambia.

Supported and Affiliated Membership

The Supporting Members scheme is a key part of the Club's strategy of encouraging the spread of knowledge and understanding of birds as widely as possible throughout Africa. The scheme enables Africans who would not otherwise have the resources to join, to become members of the Club. The scheme is funded by Supporting Members who pay a minimum of UK£30 to cover their own membership and the subscription of at least one African member. The money they contribute over and above their own subscription is placed in a special fund that is used to cover the membership expenses of African members whom they may have nominated, or who have been nominated by other Club members.

Although we have suggested a minimum of UK£30 to become a Supporting Member, any contribution is welcome. All members of the Club, even if they do not feel able to become Supporting Members themselves, are invited to nominate candidates for supported memberships. Candidates should be nationals of an African country, with a genuine interest in wild birds but without the resources to become members in their own right. Africans who think they may qualify are very welcome to put their

own names forward, supported by a letter of recommendation from someone such as their employer, teacher or an officeholder in a local wildlife organisation.

The scheme now also includes Clubs who wish to be affiliated with the African Bird Club in African countries where it is difficult for local individuals to become members in their own right. Clubs accepted for membership under the scheme receive up to six copies of each issue of the bulletin for circulation among their members. Instead of paying a membership fee, Clubs are asked to provide a short annual report on their activities that may be published in the bulletin. Clubs interested in becoming Affiliated Member Clubs are invited to apply to the ABC Secretary giving details of their membership, their constitution or a statement of their objectives and conditions of their membership, and their activities to date.

ABC Information Service

ABC offers a service to help members with information requests. Perhaps you are planning a trip to Africa and need local advice, or maybe you are in search of an obscure fact about an African species. The Club does not guarantee to find all the answers but will try to help. The service is free to ABC members. Contact: Keith

Berton, who is also custodian of ABC's journal library, at 8 Dukes Close, Folly Hill, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 0DR, UK. Tel: +44 1252 724068. Fax: +44 171 637 5626. E-mail: info@african-birdclub.org.

AfricanBirding

e-mail discussion list

Launched, in October 2000, by the ABC and the Pan-African Ornithological Congress, AfricanBirding or AB, as it is known, has become a useful forum for those interested in African birds. To join the discussion, which averages 1-2 messages a day, send a blank e-mail to AfricanBirding-subscribe@egroups.com. You will then receive an email instructing you how to join

The Club also maintains a list of members' e-mail addresses. This list is confidential and used only for Club purposes, e.g. for informing members of upcoming events and news concerning the Club. It is not divulged to anybody outside the Club or used for commercial advertising. At present it includes addresses for about 50% of the membership. Please send any additions or amendments to the membership secretary: membership@africanbirdclub.org.



Adult White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*, Nazinga Game Ranch / Bihoreau à dos blanc *Gorsachius leuconotus* adulte, Ranch de Gibier de Nazinga (Bruno Portier)

