African Bird Club

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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
- develop a Conservation Research Fund

Registered Charity No 1053920

ABC Web site

http://www.africanbirdclub.org

Membership of the ABC

Membership of the ABC is open to all and costs, per annum, UK£15 *Individual (Africa & Europe)*, UK£17 *Individual (Rest of the World)*, UK£18 *Family (Africa & Europe)*, UK£20 *Family (Rest of the World)*, UK£8 *Student (Africa & Europe)*, UK£10 *Student (Rest of the World)*, UK£25 *Libraries/Institutions*, UK£25 minimum *Supporting Member*, or UK£300 *Life Member*. To join or for further details please write to the Membership Secretary, African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.

The Bulletin of the African Bird Club

The *Bulletin of the ABC* provides a forum for news, letters, notices, recent publications, preliminary expedition results, reviews and preliminary or interim publication of studies on African birds by contributors from all parts of the world. Publication of interim 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.

Notes for Contributors

The ABC welcomes original contributions on all aspects of the birds of Africa. Africa is here defined as the area covered by Collar, N.J. & Stuart, S.N. 1985. *Threatened birds of Africa and related islands: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book,* Part 1. Cambridge: International Council for Bird Preservation, namely continental Africa, Indian Ocean islands west of 80°E, eg Madagascar, the Mascarene Islands and Socotra; Atlantic Ocean islands on or east of the mid-Atlantic ridge, eg the Tristan da Cunha group, the Azores and the Canaries.

Contributions will be accepted subject to editing and refereeing by independent referees, where appropriate. The material published is divided into *Papers, Short Notes, News & Comment, Discoveries, Reviews, Literature Gleanings, Recent Reports* and *Letters*. The Editorial Team will be happy to advise authors on the acceptability of material at draft stage if desired.

Submissions

Two copies of contributions should be submitted. Typewritten manuscripts should have double-spaced lines, on one side of the paper only, with wide margins all round. Clear handwritten manuscripts are also acceptable. All submissions will be acknowledged.

Contributions will be accepted in English or French: French summaries, as well as table and figure captions, will be printed for all major papers published in English, and vice versa. Those submitting major papers should supply a summary for translation into English, or French, as appropriate.

If possible, please submit your contribution on floppy disk and state computer (eg IBM compatible PC, Macintosh) and word-processing package (eg Word, WordPerfect) used: please note that Amstrad PCW disks are not acceptable.

When you send 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. Please always send two hard (printed) copies in addition.

Preferred names

With the current instability over worldwide lists of bird names, authors are requested to follow those used in *Birds of Africa* Vols 1–5. For species not yet covered, please use appropriate regional handbooks and checklists eg Roberts for Southern Africa, Britton for East Africa. 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.

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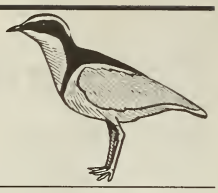


ABC membership questionnaire

Thank you to all who returned the recent questionnaire about the Club. This is the first time we have asked you for your views about what we do, and how we might do it better. A summary of the results is given here.

Just over 200 questionnaires were returned by the beginning of November 1998 and these formed the basis of this analysis. A prize draw was held and the two members to win £25 worth of ABC sales items were John Gerhart of Cairo, Egypt and Tadesse Woldemariam of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

You the membership:

- 32% of members are aged over 50, but only 8% are under 31.
- There were 36 responses from Africa, and 157 from Europe (of which 117 were UK and a further six from elsewhere).
- 53% of members joined in 1994, since which 7–15% have joined annually
- Since joining ABC, 42% of you are now more interested in Africa, only 1% are less interested, and 99% of you are likely to re-subscribe to ABC next year.
- The main reasons for joining ABC are to be kept informed about ornithology in Africa (51%) and to support a group supporting African ornithology (42%).
- 56% of you have access to the internet and/or e-mail and a further 17% plan to have access soon. However 50% of our internet users have never looked at the ABC website (although access is difficult in much of Africa).

ABC and its work:

- The two most important aims for ABC should be to encourage interest in the conservation of African birds and provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology.
- Suggestions for new activities included: helping people in Africa become more involved and trained in ornithology, promoting eco-tourism in Africa and organising ABC expeditions to Africa.
- ABC's perceived main strengths are the Bulletin, the Club's commitment, enthusiasm and focus, with experts with knowledge being available, acting as an Information network, and being both multinational and professional.
- Its perceived main weaknesses are the fact that it remains a mainly British organisation with relatively few African members and a low profile in many areas, and while it lacks money the tasks facing it in Africa are large.
- 94% of you say the Bulletin has fully/mostly met your expectations, with 60% saying the same for the Conservation Fund and 50% for Sales.
- The most popular items in the Bulletin are features on little-known African birds, destinations and species or families. The least popular are letters, Club news and announcements.

Your Council takes your views very seriously and has already started to develop a number of new ideas as a direct result of this questionnaire. We always welcome new ideas or comment on what needs to be done. Although we shall repeat our questionnaire again in a few years, we always want to hear your views.

New information service launched

ABC has launched a new 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. We do not guarantee to have all of the answers, but we will try to help. The service is provided free to ABC Members. If you need information, then contact Keith Betton, who is also the custodian of ABC's journal library. Keith Betton, 8 Dukes Close, Folly Hill, Farnham, Surrey GU9 0DR, UK. Tel: +44 1252 724068 Fax: +44-171 637 5626. E-mail: kbetton@abta.co.uk.

ABC membership

At the beginning of December 1998 the Club had 1,293 paid up members, including 213 new members recruited this year. The Club now has members in 63 different countries including 28 in Africa.

If you have not already done so please resubscribe for 1999 by completing and sending in the membership renewal form enclosed with the last bulletin. Please remember that you will receive no further Bulletins until your renewal is received. Also, please note that to save postage costs credit card subscription payments will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

Please send membership enquiries to Bill Quantrill at the Club's address or directly by e-mail: wquantrill@msn.com.

Supported and affiliated membership categories

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£25 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 which 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£25 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. African nationals 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 want 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 which 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 Corporate Sponsorship

Under the terms of the Corporate Sponsorship scheme a minimum payment of £300 entitles a sponsor to benefits under the scheme for a five-year period. Corporate sponsors are entitled to a full page advertisement in two bulletins during the five years and can also use the Club's corporate sponsorship logo in adverts and stationery. Contributions under the scheme are allocated directly to the ABC Conservation Fund. Any company or individual with enquiries or suggestions about the scheme should write to Moira Hargreaves at the Club's address or e-mail: Moira.Y.Hargreaves@btinternet.com.

British Birdwatching Fair 1998

The British Birdwatching Fair was held at Rutland Water in Leicestershire on 21–23 August 1998, with 100s of exhibitors including conservation organisations, booksellers, optical equipment and bird tour companies, and 1,000s of visitors.

The Club again had a stand, where we were able to welcome our many members who visit the fair and also spread the word about the Club among the many visitors who may not previously have known about us. As a result, 23 new members were recruited. The stand was also an opportunity for old and new members to make their selections from our growing range of Club merchandise—total takings on the stand came to over UK£2,000. The stand was manned throughout by Council members and other volunteers. Many thanks to everyone who helped. The Club plans to be present again at the 1999 Fair in August this year: if you come to Rutland, do make sure you visit your Club stand, and should you have an hour or two to spare why not offer to help with the manning. It will be a chance to meet your fellow members and to get more closely involved in helping the Club.

Birds and Birdwatching Fair, Durban 16–22 August 1998

The Club was also present at the "Birds and Birdwatching Fair" which accompanied the four-yearly International Ornithological Congress, held last August in Durban. Our stand, shared with the Middelpunt Wetlands Trust, was manned throughout the week of the Congress by three Council members. Chairman Phil Atkinson and Bill and Rowena Quantrill. They were ably supported by the ABC Representative in South Africa (and President of the Middelpunt Wetlands Trust) Deon Coetzee and his many helpers. The stand proved a focal point for the many Club members who attended the Congress, as well as enabling the visiting Council members to meet some of our southern African members and give them the opportunity to see and purchase a selection of Club merchandise. And, of course, it was a valuable opportunity to make the Club known to the cream of the world's ornithologists who were attending the Congress: 27 new members were recruited during the week.

ABC 1998 autumn meeting

A joint meeting of the African Bird Club and the Norfolk Bird Club was held in September 1998 at Blakeney Village Hall, Norfolk. An audience of c90 people was treated to an absorbing presentation, illustrated with excellent photographs, by Steve Rowlands (of Titchwell RSPB reserve) on his recent trip to Uganda, where he was involved in a wetland bird census. We are grateful to Norfolk Bird Club for their help in organising this successful meeting.

ABC Representative Scheme

The following is the current list of ABC Representatives:

Australia: Alan McBride, PO Box 190, Newport Beach, NSW 2106. Fax: 2 9973 2306. E-mail: mcbird@zip.com.au.

Belgium: Paul van Daele, Kazemattenstraat 30, 9000 Gent. Tel/fax: 9 223 6948. E-mail: pvdaele@uia.ua.ac.be.

Botswana: Chris Brewster, Matshekge Hill School, Private Bag 24, Bobonong. Tel 819272. Fax 819544.

Cameroon: O'Kah Ebwekoh Monya, Mount Cameroon Project, PO Box 437, Limbe.

Denmark: Lars Dinesen, Sjallandsgade 37, 3 tv., 2200 Copenhagen N. Tel/Fax: 35 36 71 64. E-mail: regulus@inet.uni-c.dk.

Egypt: Sherif and Mindy Baha El Din, 3 Abdalla El Katib St. Apt. 3, Dokki, Cairo. Tel/Fax: 3608160. E-mail: 103257.1554@compuserve.com.

ABC/Middelpunt Wetlands Trust stand, Birds and Birdwatching Fair, Durban (Rowena Quantrill)

Ethiopia: Ato Yilma Dellelegn and Ato Mengistu Wondafrash, Ethiopian IBA Programme, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, PO Box 60074, Addis Ababa.
France: Bob and Francoise Dowsett, 12 rue des Lavandes, Ganges, F -34190. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com.
Finland: Annika Forsten, Hantverkareg. 14 D 9, FIN-20100 Åbo. Tel. 40 5150510. E-mail: aforsten@aton.abo.fi.
Gabon: Patrice Christy, BP 2240, Libreville, Gabon. Fax: c/o ECOFAC, 775534.
Ghana: Samual Kofi Nyame, Ghana Wildlife Society, PO Box 13252, Accra.
Hungary: Ákos Hivekovics, 10 Zrinyi Street, H-8756 Nagyrecse. E-mail: falco@nt.ktg.gau.hu.
Italy: Giuseppe Micali, Via Savona 71, Milano MI 1-20144. E-mail: GMicali@USCCMAIL.bms.com.
Kenya: Colin Jackson, c/o Dept of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, PO Box 40658, Nairobi.
Magadascar: Frank Hawkins, World Wide Fund for Nature, BP 738, Antananarivo 101. Tel: 2 34885 (work), 2 31622 (home). E-mail: mesite@bow.dts.mg.
Namibia: Chris Hines, PO Box 22527, Windhoek.
São Tomé and Princípe: Angus Gascoigne, CP 289, São Tomé. Fax: 23912 23406.
Seychelles: Adrian Skerrett, Shipping House, PO Box 336, Victoria, Mahé. Fax: 322978. E-mail: maheship@seychelles.net. Or 106352.771@compuserve.com.
South Africa: Deon Coetzee, PO Box 782937, Sandton, 2146. Fax: 011 884 2739. Tel. 082 490 1212. Steve Evans, PO Box 505, Ngodwana, 1209. Tel:. 734 4973.
Tanzania: Maurus Msuha, PO Box 70919, Dar es Salaam.
The Gambia: Clive Barlow, The Atlantic Hotel, PO Box 296, Banjul. Fax: 227861.
Uganda: Prof. Derek Pomeroy, Makerere University Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources, PO Box 7298, Kampala.
USA (West coast): Joe Thompson, 4070 Sea View Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90065. E-mail: Jcthom1956@aol.com.
Zambia: Pete Leonard, Kafue Fisheries, Box 31522, Lusaka. Fax: 1 30128.
Zimbabwe: John Paxton, Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe, PO Box CY161, Causeway. Fax: 2634 794614. E-mail: birds@harare.iafrica.com.

The ABC Representative 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 meetings for local members. Existing ABC members can contact their local Representatives in the first instance with queries relating to the Club.

ABC Representatives help to recruit new members in their region, for example, by distributing ABC 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 ABC in your region please contact the Club at our postal address or contact our newly appointed Representative scheme coordinator Vicki Lucking directly by e-mail: rob.lucking@rspb.org.uk.

ABC sales items

The following items are currently available from ABC Sales.

1. ABC Sweatshirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African Bird Club Working for Birds in Africa'; black, navy or bottle-green. Sizes: medium, large, extra large and extra-extra large: UK£20.
2. ABC Polo shirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African Bird Club. Working for Birds in Africa', forest green. Sizes: small, medium, large and extra-large: UK£12.50.
3. ABC T-shirt featuring African Rollers by Mark Andrews, white. Sizes: medium, large, extra large and extra-extra large: UK£11.
4. ABC T-shirt featuring Turacos, white. Sizes: extra large only: UK£9.
5. ABC T-shirt featuring an Egyptian Plover by Martin Woodcock, white. Sizes: medium only: UK£10.
6. ABC caps featuring an embroidered ABC logo, black, bottle green, red, maroon, navy and grey: UK£7.
7. ABC enamel badge featuring a Slender-billed Curlew design: UK£1.
8. ABC car and telescope stickers: UK£1.
9. Embroidered sew-on badge, featuring ABC logo: UK£4.
10. ABC bone-china mugs: 2 designs featuring Carmine Bee-eater or Golden-breasted Starlings by Martin Woodcock: UK£7 or UK£12 a pair.
11. Pen, printed with 'African Bird Club' and ABC logo: UK£0.50
12. Pencil, printed with 'African Bird Club' and ABC logo: UK£0.25.
13. White-winged Apalis A4 colour print by Nik Borrow from *Bull. ABC* 2.2: signed and numbered limited edition of 50 at UK£10; also available unsigned at UK£5.
14. Nightjar A4 colour prints by Martin Woodcock from *Bull. ABC* 2.2: one print illustrates Mountain and Rwenzori Nightjars, the second depicts Black-shouldered and Fiery-necked Nightjars: UK£3.50 each.
15. Pair of Nightjar A4 colour prints by Martin Woodcock, mounted: UK£15 each.
16. Locally designed cards on hand-made paper, produced by the paper making co-operative of the BirdLife International-supported Kilum Mountain Forest Project in Cameroon. A selection of 5 cards in a hand-woven wallet: UK£5.
17. Self-adhesive 're-use envelope' labels featuring ABC logo. UK£1 for 10
18. *Bull. ABC*, volume 1, 1994, number 1 and 2: UK£5 each.
19. *Bull. ABC*, volume 2, 1995, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
20. *Bull. ABC*, volume 3, 1996, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
21. *Bull. ABC*, volume 4, 1997, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
22. *Bull. ABC*, volume 5, 1998, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
23. Azores Trip Report, Sept–Oct 1997 by Willem Steenge and Theo Bakker: UK£6.
24. Cameroon Trip Report, Dec 1994–Jan 1995 by Richard Webb: UK£6.
25. Cameroon Trip Report, Mar–Apr 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
26. Cape Verde Trip Report, Mar 1996 by Theo Bakker and Klaas van Dijk: UK£6.50.
27. Ethiopia Trip Report, Dec 1995–Jan 1996 by Richard Webb: UK£7.50.
28. Ethiopia Trip Report, Oct–Nov 1996 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.

29. Birding Ghana, Feb 1996 by Mindy and Sherif El Din: UK£6.50.
30. Ghana Trip Report, Jan–Feb 1997 by Simon Plat. 35 pages: UK£4.
31. Kenya Trip Report, Feb–Mar 1995 by Mike Hunter and Graham Speight: UK£8.
32. Madagascar and the Comores, Oct–Nov 1995 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
33. Madagascar, Nov–Dec 1997 by Chris Bell, Mike Hunter, Dawn Ross and Malcolm Roxby: UK£3.
34. Madagascar (with Mauritius and Reunion., winter 1997–98 by Brian Gee: UK£9.
35. Malawi, Mar 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£3.
36. Malawi and the Luangwa Valley, Zambia, Jul–Aug 1997 by Henk Hendriks: UK£8.
37. Namibia and the Cape, Nov 1994 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
38. Eastern South Africa and Zimbabwe, Feb–Mar 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£5.
39. Voyage Naturaliste au Cape Provinces d'Afrique du Sud, Sep–Oct 1997 par Georges et Mireille Olioso: UK£6.
40. Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, Jan–Feb 1996 by Eddie Williams: UK£4.50.
41. Uganda Trip Report, Jun–Aug 1995 by Henk Hendriks: UK£6.50.
42. Wakkerstroom Bird and Nature Guide, by Warwick and Michèle Tarboton: UK£6.
43. Birdwatch Zimbabwe, 1991, by Derek Solomon and Jacko Williams: UK£7.

Postage and packing: please send UK£1 for each UK order, and UK£2 for each overseas surface mail order. For overseas airmail please add UK£1 for each item ordered.

Orders: payments should be made in pounds sterling by cheque/postal order (payable to African Bird Club) or credit card. Full credit card details are required, please specify: Visa, Access, Mastercard or Eurocard; card number; cardholder's name (as it appears on card); cardholder's address; expiry date; cardholder's signature; and amount payable. Please be sure to specify your name and address and the full details of your order including quantity, with size and colour where applicable.

Please send your order to African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, United Kingdom. Enquiries may also be sent to ABC sales officer, Rowena Quantrill by e-mail to wquantrill@msn.com.

Bulletin artwork

The original painting on the cover is for sale, at £200. Phone Clive Byers on 01603 615231. Plates from the forthcoming *Thrushes: A Handbook of the Thrushes of the World* can also be reserved, with a deposit, from the same artists.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to BirdLife International for the use of their offices as a mailing address, Alcedo Publishing of Colorado Springs, USA, and Crowes of Norfolk, UK, for their assistance in producing the bulletin.

Africa Round-up

General

BirdLife's Threatened Species Checklists

BirdLife International has produced a checklist of all 1,111 threatened species of birds in the world. Each species is listed with its threat category and an indication of where it occurs in the world. Each checklist includes a form where details of sightings of threatened species can be sent to BirdLife to add to their records. It is hoped that as many birders as possible will purchase a copy of the checklist and use the form to send in their records of threatened species. In this simple way birders will be helping to provide valuable data and information for BirdLife's threatened species programme, focus of the 1998 British Birdwatching Fair. Checklists cost £2.00 from Communications, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, tel: 01223 277318, fax: 01223 277200, e-mail: birdlife@birdlife.org.uk

Source: BirdLife International

Birds on the Internet

The Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, South Africa, has a new website that, apart from containing information about the Institute itself, also provides a direct link to other bird sites worldwide. You can, for example, link up with BIOSIS (Biological Abstracts, Inc.), which has an extensive list of bird sites, including research organisations, bird clubs, museums and collections, news and discussion groups, lists, and even images and sounds. A site called "Bird links to the world" provides access to more than 2,000 bird sites, arranged by country.

The Fitzpatrick Intitute's new website can be found at http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick. For first-time surfers, simply type this address in your location (Netscape) or address (Microsoft Internet Explorer) field and you'll be on your way. If you are new to the net, a very good introductory guide, "Big Dummies Guide to the Internet", can be found at http://info.man.ac.uk/BigDummy/bdgtti.html.

Should you know of other birding websites that you cannot currently access through the Fitzpatrick Intitute website, please contact Mandy Barnett (mbarnett@botzoo.uct.ac.za) to have them added.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding *3 (4), p 15*

Ageing Egyptian Vultures

An interesting paper describing, with photographs and illustrations, the five plumages of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* has recently been published. The authors, William Clark and John Schmitt, state that most field guides and reference works do not illustrate all age classes, nor show or describe correctly the differences among juveniles and older immatures. Although *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (*BWP*), for example, correctly states that the adult plumage is attained after four annual moults, the descriptions of the immature plumages are inaccurate: second-winter plumage is almost identical to and just as dark as the juvenile plumage, and not progressively paler.

Source: Alula *4, pp 122–127*

Southern Africa

Grey-striped Francolin is a monotypic species

Since 1983, Grey-striped Francolin *Francolinus griseostriatus* which is endemic to western Angola has been viewed as a polytypic species with northern and southern populations. Pinto treated the two populations as racially distinct on the basis of eight specimens from Benguela (in the south of the species' range) which have generally darker underparts, more cinnamon than buff shading to the feather edges, darker spotting and barring on the undertail-coverts and a very slightly larger size. In recently reviewing additional specimen material, Nigel Collar concludes that none of these differences appear to constitute more than individual variation and proposes that the species be henceforth considered monotypic.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. *118, pp 124–126*

Barlow's Lark, a new endemic species, formally described and considered threatened

The formal description of the recently recognized Barlow's Lark *Certhilauda barlowi* (see *Bull. ABC* 4: 66) has been published. Peter Ryan and his four co-authors convincingly argue that there is morphological and behavioural support for the recognition of the form as a separate species. Barlow's Lark is patchily distributed in an area of maximum 18,000 km² in the vicinity of the Orange River mouth and has thus the most restricted range of the species in the Karoo Lark complex. More than 80% of its range is in south-west Namibia, with the remainder in South Africa. It occurs almost exclusively within restricted access, diamond mining areas, where domestic livestock are excluded. There is concern about the future of this area, once diamond exploitation ceases. Changes to land use practices which reduce vegetation cover could seriously impact this species. The authors suggest to use Barlow's Lark as a 'flagship' species for the protection of the many other endemic species found in that unique area.

Source: Ibis *140, pp 605–619*

Rare birds in South Africa 1997

The 11th report of BirdLife South Africa Rarities Committee includes the first Buller's Albatross *Diomedea bulleri* for Africa (see *Bull. ABC* 5: 90), the second record of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* in South Africa and the fifth records of White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* and Golden Pipit *Tmetothylacus tenellus*. Another new seabird for Africa, Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*, is currently under review by the Committee.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding *3 (5), pp 66–69*

Citrine Wagtail in South Africa

The spectacular find of a first-year male Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* at Gamtoos river mouth, 50 km west of Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, in May 1998, resulted in extensive media coverage and a steady stream of birders to the site. The occurrence of

this species so far from its southernmost previously known African wintering site in Ethiopia (see *Bull. ABC* 5: 129–130) is explained as a case of reverse migration by a young bird.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding *3 (3), p 15*

Roberts 7...

The seventh edition of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*, edited by Peter Ryan and Phil Hockey, is being produced at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute in Cape Town. The new edition will be a handbook rather than a field guide, and will include the main findings of the *Atlas of Southern African Birds*, and other new information. More information on biology and ecology, including summaries of movements, social behaviour, moult, parasites and disease, and survival, is promised. Greater attention will also be paid to geographic variation within species. The text will be referenced, and the literature consulted for the book will be held at the Fitzpatrick library and included on a computerised bibliography. The authors request assistance with data capture (mostly reading articles in the Fitzpatrick library). There is still time for data from notebooks and fieldwork to be included too, and a list of birds for which information on their basic breeding biology is lacking will be published in the next *Africa—Birds and Birding*. No publication date is given. Further information: birds@botzoo.uct.ac.za

Source: Africa—Birds and Birding *3 (3), p 17*

Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori* by Mark Andrews

Sightings of tagged Kori Bustards from Etosha wanted

A research project on Africa's largest bustard, Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*, which is the world's heaviest flying bird, was started in March 1997 in Etosha National Park, Namibia. In order to study the species' biology; 64 birds have been wing-tagged and several radio-tagged. Preliminary data indicate that males wander over a large area after the breeding season, whereas females have small home ranges. Jackals and leopards killed several sleeping birds at night. Due to significant rains, the 1997 breeding season was productive, the project finding 70 bustard broods. However, due to El Niño, rainfall in 1998 is below average, with large areas of the park remaining dry. Birders planning to visit Etosha are kindly asked to look out for wing-tagged Kori Bustards. The tags, which are fixed at the left wing, are white, yellow or blue. Records can be sent to Tim and Laurel Osborne, P.O. Box 22, Okaukuejo via Outjo, Namibia, or can be written in the sightings book at the tourist offices in Okaukuejo, Halali and Namutoni.

Source: Africa—Birds and Birding *3 (3), p 18*

Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* by Mark Andrews

Oxpecker hybrids in Zimbabwe

In 1975, both Yellow-billed and Red-billed Oxpeckers were reintroduced to Matobo National Park, just south of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Only the larger Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus*, which had been released in greater numbers, 'caught' and is now estimated to have a population of c200 birds. The Red-billed Oxpecker *B. erythrorhynchus* almost immediately disappeared. In recent years, however, small numbers of Red-billed Oxpeckers have been observed in the Park, probably as a result of natural range expansion due to the move by cattle ranchers from poisonous dips to oxpecker-friendly (green label) dips. In December 1997–January 1998, a mixed pair successfully raised a brood of hybrids. The nestlings had the slim bills and lower weight of the Red-billed Oxpecker, the tails of the Yellow-billed (with rufous instead of blackish brown inner vanes), and their coloration was midway between Yellow-billed's buff and Red-billed's brown. They fledged at the beginning of February.

Source: Africa—Birds and Birding *3 (4), p 20*

First evidence for pollen transfer on bird's tongues

The apparently first evidence for pollen transfer on the tongue of birds was found by University of Cape Town botanist Anton Pauw. In a recent issue of *Nature*, Pauw describes how the flowers of the milkweed *Microloma sagittatum* clip parcels of pollen precisely onto the tongues of Lesser Double-collared Sunbirds *Nectarinia chalybea*. The pollen parcels are carried inside the birds' mouths to the next flower where they are detached mechanically. Pauw realised that the plant's shape welcomes birds at the expense of insects because only a bill can penetrate its tightly closed flower. He suspects that bird tongues pollinate several kinds of milkweed, all of which were previously thought to be pollinated by insects.

Source: Africa—Birds and Birding *3 (5), p 17*

Grey Plover recaptured after 16 years

A Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* ringed as an adult at Langebaan, Western Cape Province, South Africa, on 25 April 1981, was recaptured 17 years later, on 26 May 1997, at Dzhankoy, on the shores of the Black Sea, Ukraine, 10,127 km from its original capture site. Grey Plovers breed in the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia, c15,000 km from Langebaan. In the 16 years since it was ringed, the bird thus covered more than 500,000 km on migration.

Source: Africa—Birds and Birding *3 (4), p 13*

Namuli revisited

Mount Namuli, the highest mountain in northern Mozambique, forms one of the southern outliers of Africa's Eastern Arc mountains. Its forested slopes are home to the Namuli Apalis *Apalis (thoracica) lynesi*, a handsome bird that bears little resemblance to the other forms of Bar-throated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* with which it is currently considered conspecific. It also is the only known locality for the

nominate race of the enigmatic Dapplethroat *Arcanator orostruthus*.

Despite the importance of Namuli's forests for birds, it had only once been visited by an ornithologist, Jack Vincent, in 1932. During November–December 1998 the mountain was revisited by six South African and Mozambican biologists to assess the conservation status of the forests and their birds.

Although there is ongoing forest clearing for agriculture and grazing, large tracts of forest remain above 1,300 m, and all the birds reported by Vincent are still present. Namuli Apalis is abundant, occurring in both forest and edge habitats, and as a result is tolerant of partial forest clearing. Thyolo Alethe *Alethe choloensis* is common, occurring in forest as well as remnant patches of riparian woodland down to 1,200 m, and the rare *belcheri* race of Green Barbet *Stactolaema olivacea* is fairly common above 1,400 m. Most exciting, however, was the discovery that Dapplethroat is abundant in undisturbed forest; Vincent only collected a single specimen at Namuli. A full account of the birds at Mount Namuli will appear in *Bull. ABC* 6 (2).

Source: Peter G Ryan *in litt. January 1999*

New park in Madagascar

The new Masoala National Park was officially established on 18 October 1997 and covers 2,176 km^2. It is particularly well-known for its area of forest, containing the rare Madagascar Serpent Eagle *Eutriorchis astur*, long feared extinct but rediscovered in 1988 and regularly seen since, and the equally rare Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei* (see *Bull. ABC* 5: 89).

Sources: Wildlife Conservation *March–April 1998, pp 29–35;* Oryx *32, p183*

Diet of Madagascar Red Owl

The discovery of a number of localities in east Madagscar holding Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei* and, in particular, the location of a nest in September 1995 (see *Bull. ABC* 5: 89), has also permitted researchers to glean information concerning the species' ranging behaviour, roosting sites, vocalisations and food requirements. Writing in a recent issue of *Wilson Bulletin*, Steve Goodman and Russell Thorstrom, conclude, on the basis of pellet analysis, that the species feeds almost exclusively on small endemic mammals. It appears to hunt the forest edge and also uses human-degraded habitats. There appears to be virtually no overlap in diet with locally breeding Barn Owls *T. alba*.

Source: Wilson Bull. *110, pp 417–421*

Madagascar joins the Ramsar Convention and names two Ramsar sites

On 25 September 1998, Madagascar became the 113th Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the treaty will come into force for Madagascar on 25 January 1999. Two sites were named as the new Party's first Wetlands of International Importance, one of them a Ramsar landmark event.

The first site—Lac Tsimanampetsotsa—comprises the Réserve Naturelle Intégrale de Tsimanampetsotsa and the zone to the west of the lake, and covers 45,604 ha. Located in the province of Toliara near the south-west coast near Efoetse, the site has been designated by virtue of being a rare or unusual wetland in the biogeogaphical region with an appreciable assemblage of rare, vulnerable or endangered species. Wetland types listed are: permanent saline/brackish/alkaline lakes and subterranean karst and cave hydrological systems, the latter, because along the east side of the lake it is bounded by chalk cliffs containing caves and subterranean freshwater rivers which host, *inter alia*, a vulnerable species of blind fish *Typhleotris madagascariensis*; in addition, Cave Mitoho is a sacred site. This is the first Ramsar site ever to have been listed in the wetland type added to the Ramsar Classification System by Resolution VI.5 (1996) on subterranean karst wetlands.

The second newly designated site is called the Complexe des lacs de Manambolomaty, which includes Lakes Soamalipo, Befotaka, Ankerika, and Antsamaka, some 7,491 ha located in the province of Mahajanga in west-central Madagascar, near Antsalova. It includes 10% of the world population of the *Haliaeetus vociferoides*, which is endemic and Critically Endangered, as well the endemic freshwater tortoise *Erymnochelys madagascariensis*, in what the Madagascar National Ramsar Committee argued is one of the most important populations of this species, which is fast disappearing elsewhere in western Madagascar. At various times of the year the site holds the largest known concentration of the endangered endemic Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri*. It is an important feeding and moulting site for the teal and many other duck species. Conservation strategies for this complex of four lakes are being developed through a collaborative approach involving the local communities, the Ministry of Water and Forests, the Peregrine Fund, and Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust.

Sources: Bureau of the Convention on Wetlands; Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust

Flock of Madagascar Teal found

A flock of 67 of the endangered Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri* has been found near Tambohorano in western Madagascar. The birds were found during surveys of the ZICOMA Project, the Important Bird Areas programme in Madagascar.

Source: Bird Conserv. International *8 (3), p 311*

New species of scops-owl described from the Comoros

Lafontaine & Moulaert have recently described a new species of scops-owl, *Otus moheliensis*, from the island of Mohéli in the Comoros, where it is known from dense humid forest at 450–790 m. The new taxon was first noted in February 1995 and specimens were taken in October 1996. Further details can be found elsewhere in the bulletin.

Source: J. African Zool. *112, pp 163–169*

Mauritius Kestrels doing well

Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*, endemic to the island of Mauritius, which was nearing extinction in the 1970s (only four birds were known in the wild in 1974), now numbers a healthy 540 wild individuals due to the restoration programme established by the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust in co-operation with many other organisations. The last captive-reared bird was released in 1994 and monitoring of the population since then has confirmed that the species no longer requires management or assistance.

Source: Oryx *32, p 183*

GEF funding for BirdLife Seychelles

BirdLife Seychelles have secured substantial Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Seychelles government funding for their Avian Ecosystems Management Project which aims to restore the Granitic Seychelles Endemic Bird Area (EBA). Work will

include research on three critically endangered species including Seychelles Magpie-Robin *Copsychus sechellarum*.

Source: World Birdwatch *20 (3), p 5*

Shoebill study in Zambia

A 28-month study of Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* breeding behaviour was mounted by G. Renson in the Bangweulu swamps in the north of the country. In a recent paper in *Alauda*, the nest-building, courtship displays, egg-laying, incubation, hatching, fledging and feeding behaviour are described in detail. Suggestions for conservation are made, and the study is illustrated with numerous superb colour photographs.

Source: Alauda *66, pp 81–96*

Red-whiskered Bulbul confirmed to breed on Réunion

A short note in the most recent issue of *Alauda* describes the first breeding data collected for Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* on Réunion.

Source: Alauda *66, pp 258–260*

East Africa

New sites for Ankober Serin

Survey expeditions conducted by the Ethiopian Important Bird Areas (IBA) Project team in 1997–98 have extended the known range of Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis*. To the three sites included in *Birds to Watch 2* (Collar *et al.* 1994), a fourth, Kundi, was added in August 1997. Ten birds were seen at this site, situated 30 km from Debre Birhan and 12 km from Ankober. In March 1998, members of the IBA team were able to confirm the occurrence of the species in the Simien Mountains, more than 700 km north of the original site, where the bird was first reported on 3 December 1996 (see *Bull. ABC* 4: 144). In April 1998, 100 individuals were seen at Korate and a further 50 between Wekelo and Lemi along the Addis Ababa–Alem Ketema road. These records suggest that new sites for the species may still be discovered.

Source: EWNHS Newsletter *July–Sept 1998, pp 5–6*

New data on the Ethiopian population of Chough

The Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* in Ethiopia is little-studied, although it is the only population of this comparatively widespread species to inhabit the Afroalpine ecosystem. Between November 1996 and January 1997 (the non-breeding season), Ann Delestrade conducted surveys for the species in many parts of the country. Populations were located in the Bale and Simien Mountains, the Dilanta highlands and Mt Abune Yosef, where Choughs had not previously been recorded. All birds were recorded between 2,800 and 4,200 m. The vocalisations of this population, which has been accorded subspecific status (*P. p. baileyi*), appeared to differ substantially from those of birds in the European Alps. The author speculates that the Ethiopian Chough population may number only 1,000–1,300 individuals in three sub-populations between which probably little, if any, exchanges occur. Delestrade concludes that the Ethiopian Chough population may be vulnerable if not threatened.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. *118, pp 101–105*

Forest birds in Taita Hills, Kenya

A recent paper in *Bird Conservation International* by Thomas Brooks and his co-workers analyses the conservation status of 47 forest bird species in the Taita Hills, based on field surveys in July–August 1996, remote image sensing, museum specimens and a literature review. Of the three endemic species—Taita Thrush *Turdus helleri*, Taita Apalis *Apalis fuscigularis* and Taita White-eye *Zosterops silvanus*—all considered globally crtical in *Birds to watch 2*, the authors recommend that the thrush and apalis be retained within this category, but the white-eye be down-listed to endangered. Among other forest species known from the area, one is considered globally vulnerable (Abbott's Starling *Cinnyricinclus femoralis*), one globally near-threatened (Southern Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus fasciatus*), one regionally vulnerable (African Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*), nine regionally near-threatened (Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris*, Mountain Buzzard *Buteo oreophilus*, Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata*, Grey-olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cerviniventris*, Orange Ground-Thrush *Zoothera gurneyi*, Evergreen Forest-Warbler *Bradypterus lopezi*, Four-coloured Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus quadricolor* and Sharpe's Starling *Cinnyricinclus sharpii*) and four of regional responsibility (Hartlaub's Turaco *Tauraco hartlaubi*, Moustached Green Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus leucomystax*, Mountain Greenbul *Andropadus nigriceps* and Eastern Double-collared Sunbird *Nectarinia mediocris*). Four points for the future safeguarding of the area are recommended: biological research planned by the National Museums of Kenya should be implemented; the outreach to local communities, as planned by the East African Wildlife Society, also requires urgent implementation; management plans for the forests should be outlined and their legal status clarified; and exotic trees should be removed from within the forests, cleared areas replanted with native trees and sustainable forest use encouraged.

Source: Bird Conserv. International *8, pp 119–139*

Shoebill decline in Uganda

Just 19 Shoebills *Balaeniceps rex* were discovered during a recent two-week survey of Ugandan wetland sites. Previous estimates had placed the country's population at up to 600 birds.

Source: Bird Conserv. International *8, p 208*

Song mimicry by Rufous-naped Lark

During late April–July 1994, at a site in central Kenya, a single Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana* repeatedly used ground-based songs which closely imitated that of Montane Nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus*. The aerial song of Rufous-naped Lark is rarely uttered by the species at this site, perhaps due to sympatry with its more common congeners—Flappet *M. rufocinnamomea* and Fawn-coloured Larks *M. africanoides*. The mimic was eventually collected in early July, over a month after the nocturnal songs of Montane Nightjar had ceased at the study locality.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. *118, pp 153–158*

New website address for EANHS and National Museums of Kenya

The website address of the East African Natural History Society and the National Museums of Kenya is now http://www.museums.or.ke.

Source: Ashah Owano *in litt. 1998*

Tanzania creates new reserve

The Amani Nature Reserve in the East Usambara mountains, featured in *Bull. ABC* 4 (2) and home to seven threatened bird species including Usambara

Eagle Owl *Bubo (poensis) vosseleri* and Dappled Mountain Robin *Modulatrix orostruthus*, has recently been legally gazetted by the Tanzanian government. The reserve encompasses 8,380 ha, including forest owned by private tea companies and Amani Botanical Gardens.

Sources: World Birdwatch *20 (2), p 7;* Oryx *32, p 254*

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* by Craig Robson

More on the avifauna of Socotra

The results of two recent (November 1993 and November 1997) French expeditions to Socotra have been published recently. Among the interesting observations reported are the first records for the archipelago of Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, the second records of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* and European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, and, most importantly, a host of new breeding and natural history data for many endemic and little-known taxa, including the first indication that Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* may, as long suspected, breed on Socotra.

Source: Alauda *66, 235–246*

Update to the birds of Zanzibar

Archer & Iles, writing in *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.*, provide details of 34 new species to Zanzibar Island recorded since the completion of Pakenham's checklist in 1979. Of these, 14 are Palearctic migrants, 12 wanderers from the African mainland, seven are oceanic species and one is an intra-African migrant. These additions bring the list of species recorded on the island to 217.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. *118, pp 166–172*

West Africa

New firefinch in Nigeria

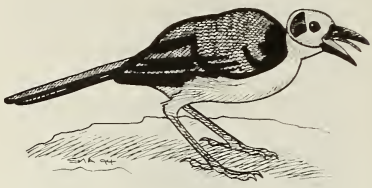
Robert Payne has described a new species of firefinch *Lagonosticta*, which is restricted to the Jos Plateau and inselbergs to the east and north, in central Nigeria. Named Rock Firefinch *L. sanguinodorsalis*, the male has a red back (brown or greyish in African Firefinch *L. rubricata*, Chad Firefinch *L. umbrinodorsalis* and Mali Firefinch *L. virata*) and a grey crown (red in Black-bellied Firefinch *L. rara*). The basis for its separation as a species is these and other morphological differences, and that it has a unique relationship with the Jos Plateau Indigobird *Vidua maryae* (which was only considered specifically distinct in 1994). Indigobirds mimic the songs of their specific hosts, and analysis of the songs of the Jos Plateau species led Payne to doubt the assumption that they parasitised African Firefinch. A closer look at the firefinches in the indigobird's range has resulted in the description of this new species, which has a distinct song, which the indigobird mimics. Payne proposes that both species should be treated as near-threatened, and their limited range makes them restricted-range species (and the Jos Plateau therefore an Endemic Bird Area). The species appears to occur in two or three of the sites on the draft list of Nigerian Important Bird Areas, currently being prepared by Nigerian Conservation Foundation and RSPB under the auspices of the BirdLife International African IBA programme.

Source: Ibis *140, pp 368–381*

Melanism in Long-tailed Hawk

Demey & Fishpool, writing in a recent issue of *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.*, have reconfirmed the existence of a melanistic morph of the Long-tailed Hawk *Urotriorchis macrourus*, in which the underparts can appear grey or blackish slate instead of chestnut. This morph appears to have gone unnoticed or even disbelieved in some of the standard ornithological literature. The authors present details of two specimens of this morph held in the Natural History Museum collection and two sight records in Yapo Forest, Ivory Coast.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. *118, pp 105–108*



Yellow-headed Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* by Mark Andrews

New locality for Yellow-headed Picathartes

Prepatory work for a new BirdLife International / Direction pour la Protection de la Nature project in Mount Peko, western Ivory Coast has led to the discovery of a new population of Yellow-headed Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus*. This is the fourth site to be located in the country, although one nesting area was lost to land clearance sometime prior to December 1993 (see *Bull. ABC* 1: 8).

Source: Bird Conserv. International *8, p 207*

New species of robin-chat in Central African Republic

The discovery of a new species of robin-chat was announced at the 22nd International Ornithological Congress, in South Africa, in August 1998. Full details, including a photo, are at http://www.abcnews.com/sections/science/DailyNews/robin980821.html

Pamela Beresford, a graduate student at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, first encountered it in November 1996, during a World-wide Fund for Nature-sponsored survey in the Central African Republic. The small olive-brown species is similar to other forest-robins except that its throat and upper breast are bright yellow-red and the belly is yellow. Other forest robins typically have white bellies and upper breasts. Beresford has since examined c300 forest-robin specimens from 89 areas at seven museums, and plans to publish a full scientific description in due course—probably sometime next year.

Source: The Associated Press, Durban *21 August 1998*

Waterbirds in Senegal in January 1997

The latest report (no. 63) of the International for Working Group Waterbird & Wetland Research

(WIWO) concerns a survey of the Sine-Saloum delta in January 1997. The 240 page report is now available and contains much useful information for those interested in Palearctic waterbirds and West African birds in general. The report is in French with a five-page English summary. *Oiseaux d'eau dans le Delta du Sine-Saloum et la Petit Côte, Sénégal, janvier 1997* by Frans Schepers *et al.* can be ordered by paying Dfl 25 plus Dfl 15 for administration directly to postal giro account 2666009 or ABN-AMRO bank account 570216613 of Stichting WIWO, Fetha 23, 3633 CT Vreeland, Netherlands, or by sending cash or Eurocheque (free of the Dfl 15 administration cost) to the same address.

Contributed by Ekko C. Smith

Population of Cape Verde Cane Warbler rediscovered

The globally vulnerable Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* historically occurred on three islands in the archipelago: Santiago, São Nicolau and Brava. None have been recorded on Brava since 1969 and the species has undergone a drastic decline on Santiago. The last report from São Nicolau was in 1924, but the recent discovery, in a Lisbon collection, of a specimen taken in 1970 prompted a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds-funded survey which located eight warbler territories. However, increasing desertification on this island threatens the species' survival there and a management plan to encourage farmers to plant stands of cane *Arundo donax* is clearly required.

Source: World Birdwatch *20 (3), p 6*

Serious decline in Raso Lark numbers

Only 45 pairs of the threatened Raso Lark *Alauda razae* were counted on the islet of Raso, Cape Verdes. Recent drought on the island appears to be the main cause of the decline and long-term desertification is clearly a major threat to the species. In 1992 the population was estimated at 250 pairs.

Source: World Birdwatch *20 (3), p 5*

New bird records in Senegal...

A recent paper, by Sauvage and Rodwell, in *Malimbus* will be essential reading for students of the ornithology of Senegambia. The work, the result of several ornithological expeditions to Senegal between 1984 and 1994, details observations of 438 species, of which three—Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Grey-rumped Swallow *Hirundo griseopyga* and Simple Leaflove *Chlorocichla simplex*—were first country records, 50 seen on fewer than 10 previous occasions in Senegal, and 273 species which were recorded in at least one new one-degree square.

Source: Malimbus *20, pp 75–122*

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*
by Mark Andrews

...and elsewhere in West Africa

A series of short notes in the same issue of *Malimbus* document the first Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* and Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* in Guinea-Bissau, confirms the occurrence of Buff-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia adelberti* and Fire-bellied Woodpecker *Dendropicos pyrrhogaster* in Cameroon, and adds Brown-throated Sand Martin *Riparia paludicola* to the list of species recorded from Ivory Coast.

Source: Malimbus *20, pp 123–128*

North Africa

Winter records of Grey Phalarope in north Morocco...

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* is known to winter off the coasts of Senegal, Mauritania and south Morocco. A recent paper in *Alauda* analyses winter (defined as mid-November to mid-February) sightings of the species off the north coast of Morocco and establishes that it is also regular, in small numbers, off this coastline in winter. The authors located 12 sightings involving more than 10 birds north of 28°N in Morocco since 1926, the maximum count being 61 off Merja de Sidi Bou Ghaba on 1–7 January 1963.

Source: Alauda *66, 113–116*

...and White Storks in Algeria

Since 1994, small numbers of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* breeding in north-east Algeria have been remaining to winter in this area, and unconfirmed reports of the same phenonomen exist

White Storks *Ciconia ciconia*
by Mark Andrews

from elsewhere in north-west Africa. Winter temperatures in this region are usually mild and food availability apparently high. During the last 100 years a number of species of waterfowl, several desert and Mediterranean passerines and certain insect species have apparently expanded their ranges northward. Whether global warming has played a part in these developments is, of course, unknown.

Source: Brit. Birds *91, p 377*

Slender-billed Curlew returns to Morocco in 1998

After an absence of three years, a Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* has again been recorded at Merja Zerga, the species' well-known wintering site in Morocco. An adult bird was seen on 11 February 1998. The record awaits verification by the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee.

Source: Bird Conserv. International *8, p 309*

Eurasian Collared Dove in Algeria

The first Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* in Algeria was reported in September 1994, when one individual was seen in Annaba, a coastal town in the eastern part of the country. In March 1995, two pairs were sighted at the same locality and in February 1996 11 birds were counted. Breeding was proved in June 1996, when a pair successfully raised two young. Records from 1997 confirm the species' expansion in the town's residential area, with 40 birds seen in March and 115 in December. As the species has not yet been found west of Annaba, colonisation from Morocco, where the dove was first reported in 1986, appears unlikely. The records from eastern Algeria, together with those from neighbouring Tunisia, where the first sighting was made in 1995, suggest immigration from Sardinia.

Source: Alauda *66, pp 251–253*

Request for Information

Madagascar Teal: observations required

Since late 1996, Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust (JWPT) has been undertaking a conservation programme for the endangered Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri*. The species is believed to occur in west Madagascar, from just south of Tulear to the north-east tip of the country but knowledge of its exact range is still patchy. Madagascar Teal live in coastal areas, on shallow lakes, rivers, estuaries and mudbanks, both in open areas and in mangroves. It specialises in feeding in shallow water (10 cm deep or less) and tends to walk through the shallows filtering organic matter from the mud. West Madagascar has a marked dry season (May–December) during the austral winter and so the availablity of suitable feeding areas in the different zones, changes during the year. Muds that are available early in the year tend to dry up and are replaced by other areas when water levels are reduced. Part of our programme entails ringing birds in an effort to help us understand population density and movements of birds. This is especially difficult given its nomadic nature. We now have 98 teal ringed. We are appealing for any sightings be they ringed or non-ringed birds. Please provide details on where you saw birds, a brief description of the habitat, the number of teal seen and if they were ringed. Any sightings will be of great benefit and all sightings will be fully acknowledged in reports and publications. If you wish to know more about the programme or have any records then you can contact us at JWPT or our Madagascar address. Contacts: Glyn Young, JWPT, Les Augrés Manor, Jersey JE3 5BP, Channel Islands. E-mail: jerseyzoo@jwpt.org; or Richard Lewis, JWPT, BP 8511, Antananarivo, Madagascar. E-mail: jwpt@dts.mg

African Bird Club *Conservation Fund* Update

In 1998, seven awards totalling over £3,000 were made by the ABC Conservation Fund. These awards embraced a wide range of activities, in five countries, from environmental education projects to research on endangered species. A brief synopsis of each award is given below and it is intended that in the future, regular reports from recipients of Conservation Fund awards will appear in *Bull. ABC*.

- The St Agnes School, Nattyole, Uganda received binoculars, field guides and advisory material to help start up a school wildlife club.
- Musila Fabian received an award to carry out a one-year study into the impacts of selective logging on the globally threatened Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis* in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in Kenya.
- Norbert Cordeiro was funded to carry out a pilot study on the effects of forest fragmentation upon fruit-eating birds in the East Usambara mountains in Tanzania.
- The Kakamega Biodiversity and Tourism Association was awarded a grant from the fund to establish conservation education programmes in six primary schools adjacent to Kakamega Forest in Kenya. Kakamega Forest is an Important Bird Area supporting 16 bird species found nowhere else in Kenya.
- Christine Dranzoa received an award to continue her study on Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani* in Mabira Forest, Uganda. Nahan's Francolin is a Data Deficient species found only in the north-east of the Republic of Congo and in west and south-central Uganda. This project forms part of a wider study to examine the effects of timber harvesting and other human activities upon Nahan's Francolin in three Ugandan forests (see pp. 22–25).
- The Conservation Fund also made a contribution towards a 12-month training visit to BirdLife South Africa by Tharcisse Ukizintambara. Tharcisse is a Rwandan national who has been working in Kenya for the Albertine Rift Conservation Society after fleeing the civil war in his home country. During his trip to South Africa, Tharcisse will work on the South African IBA project and will also assist on a pilot project to establish a network of Wildlife Clubs in South Africa. It is hoped that once the civil war in Rwanda ends, Tharcisse will be able to return home and play a key role in rebuilding the Rwandan conservation movement using the skills he has gained in South Africa.
- Finally, a contribution was made toward a South African led expedition to the Namuli Massif, north Mozambique. The Namuli Massif forms part of the Eastern Arc Mountains Endemic Bird Area, supports five globally threatened bird species (including the endemic Namuli Apalis *Apalis (thoracica) lynesi*) and has not been visited by ornithologists since 1932.

For further information about the ABC Conservation Fund see p. 26 of the Supplement to this bulletin.

Dry season refuges for survival in Africa

Dale B. Hanmer

Les huits années d'études dans l'est des régions montagneuses du Zimbabwe, et les 16 années précédentes d'études au Malawi, donnent d'importantes mais non quantifiables, évidences que beaucoup d'espèces d'Afrotropicales passerines font de réguliers ou érratiques mouvements en réponse aux conditions crées par les saisons sèches. Si un prolongement de la sècheresse avait lieu, ces sites de saisons sèches feraient d'importants refuges pour beaucoup de passerines. L'étude de genre *Nectarinia* indique que les oiseaux adultes sont plus adaptés pour survivre dans ces conditions. Quelques espèces de petites passerines d'afrique auraient une espérance de vie plus lonque que leurs espèces similaire vivant en Europe, mais plus d'informations serait à exigér.

For 16 years, I ringed birds in the lower Shire valley of Malawi, at 60 m asl and c450 km by river from the sea. The land was flat and marshy, but had been partially drained so that not only the sugar cane fields, but also the factory and staff houses, were only just above water-level; during the rainy season the area often became very wet.

My trapping area, of 3–4 ha, consisted of a variety of habitats: a pond with *Typha* bullrushes, lawns and shrubs, dense mixed moist woodland, grassland with *Acacia / Combretum* thicket and a few baobabs *Adansonia digitata* and, reaching the river, a saltmarsh with *Phragmites* reeds and some bushes. With eight nets set in different habitats, I caught birds every day throughout the year; annual totals were in excess of 2,500 individuals.

When writing up my data, I found a pattern of occurrence in many species other than known Palearctic or Afrotropical migrants, and surmised that even African resident species had a tendency to move at least a short distance between breeding and wintering quarters.

During those 16 years, there were droughts or summers with low rainfall, but as I did not keep a weather book, I made no connection between climate and bird movements. This is unfortunate, because, with hindsight, a relationship between captures and weather patterns may have been discernible.

Sunbird studies

In 1989, I moved to the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and a hillside covered in miombo woodland (*Brachystegia / Julbernardia* and associated species), at 1,200 m in the western rainshadow of the Bvumba Mountains. It was evident from the start that trapping in miombo would not produce large number of birds, but I usually caught a few each weekend, even in winter. Having been asked to elucidate sunbird movements, I started regular monthly trapping at two botanical gardens at 1,200 and 1,550 m, with riverine or montane forest and apparently permanent water, as well as much sunbird food.

Over 1,000 sunbirds were caught over the next 18 months, as well as c600 birds of other genera. Then came the worst drought in living memory. The summer of 1991–1992 was almost completely dry and following years little wetter; normal rain did not resume until mid-January 1996. Surprisingly, catch totals at the botanic gardens increased until late 1994, although there appeared to be fewer birds present. I still caught 1,000 birds in 1995. In contrast, at my home—Mitsasa—where the garden and woodland resembled a desert, the only birds were a few doves and small seed-eaters taking advantage of my seed tray and bird bath.

Once the rains returned, I assumed that bird numbers at the sunbird sites would increase, which they did at first. However, numbers subsequently decreased and, now (July 1998), monthly trapping totals are well below those of the first three drought years, despite two successful breeding seasons (judging by the number of juveniles caught). In contrast, some species (particularly small seed-eaters) which disappeared during the drought, have now returned.

During the drought, I started regular trapping at Mountain Home (1,460 m), a private garden on a steep border hillside where there were many proteas and aloes, as well as permanent water. Here, too, we caught large numbers of birds until spring 1996, but now rarely catch 20 birds at each trapping session. Unfortunately much of the protea had died by the end of the drought which must have had an effect on sunbird numbers, but would not explain the reduction in numbers of other genera.

Mitsasa was gradually repopulated and among the birds which appeared were some colour-ringed ones not seen for several years. They must have spent the drought years in an area which retained sufficient

food and water for the survival of at least a few birds, perhaps near the dam 2 km away in the valley, as this did not completely dry up.

Results

In July 1997 I collated my data for all sites, finding 26 birds, ringed before the drought, which had been recaught five or more years later; all but two had been adult when the drought started. Only 14% of those known to be five or more years old had been ringed when under a year old, whereas in Malawi, 32% of those known to be seven or more years old, had been ringed when immature. The drought has had an effect on immature survival in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, yet some had survived, although adults had survived the drought more successfully.

During the first 2–3 years of the drought, considerable bird movement was noted in the Mutare area, with many species appearing which do not normally occur there. This appeared to indicate that birds were moving in search of better conditions. No such movement was noticed during the final two years of the drought; presumably by then birds had either found a suitable place in which to survive, or had died. Some of the 'vagrants' remained in Mutare and were seen regularly until the drought ended, but since then there have been no reports of unusual species in the area.

The high trapping totals at the botanic gardens and Mountain Home during the drought produced a high recapture rate, with many birds being recaught frequently until spring 1996. Thereafter, with weather conditions back to normal, the recapture rate has decreased and few of the regulars have been seen again. This suggests that the overall reduction in numbers at these sites is due to many birds having left, in order to return to their usual sites which they inhabited before the drought.

Mountain Home and Bvumba Botanical Garden, with permanent water, and La Rochelle Botanical Garden, where the stream and dam dried up, but limited water from a bore hole kept plants and shrubs green and flowering, provided food for many species and must have attracted birds from surrounding dry areas. These birds would have departed when conditions elsewhere improved.

From my trapping data it appears that, among small birds (under 60–70g), insectivores and omnivores have the best survival rate in both southern Malawi and the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, with some very tiny (7–12g) warblers and sunbirds being able to live for at least nine years. It also appears that, in general, small African birds may live longer than similar-sized European species. Dr W Peach (UK) is presently working through my Malawi data to determine survival rates and has obtained some surprisingly high figures for several species, relative to known survival rates in European birds. This study is incomplete and I therefore cannot supply further details.

Dry season refuges

Why should African birds live longer than their European counterparts? The European winter is such that many birds head for Africa after breeding and long migratory flights must reduce life expectancy, whereas residents have to contend with snow and harsh weather, but Africa also does not have an equable climate.

Resident southern and central African birds have to contend with a long dry period each year and, in Zimbabwe and Malawi, this usually commences in April–May and continues until October or even December; from October temperatures reach over 40°C. Food and water supplies must be affected by the regular winter and early summer drought, so African birds must have a strategy to deal with this if they are to survive.

I believe that the key to this strategy is movement. Off-season migration by Palearctic and Afrotropical birds is well known and my Malawi studies suggested that off-season movement occurs in many resident African species. Palearctic migrants, eg Great Reed *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and Garden Warblers *Sylvia borin* travel to a specific area (often the same clump of bushes) each winter and return to Europe to breed in the area in which they hatched. I see no reason why African birds cannot also learn where there is a suitable place in which to wait for conditions appropriate for their return to breeding areas. Adults would know where they spent previous winters, whereas immature birds would have to search for a suitable place and perhaps not find one, which would account for apparently high immature mortality; I ring 100s of young sunbirds each year in February–June, but recapture very few in following years, even under normal conditions.

If African birds tend to move after breeding (immatures at random and adults with purpose), to areas with permanent water (and hence food) in which to spend the dry season, then at least the majority of adults, which are the important group in terms of species survival, should breed again. Random movement by young birds should permit the discovery of new dry season havens. Should drought occur, birds would react in the same way and probably remain in the refuge until conditions improved. Such behaviour would lead to the survival of at least some individuals. If the drought were of long dura-

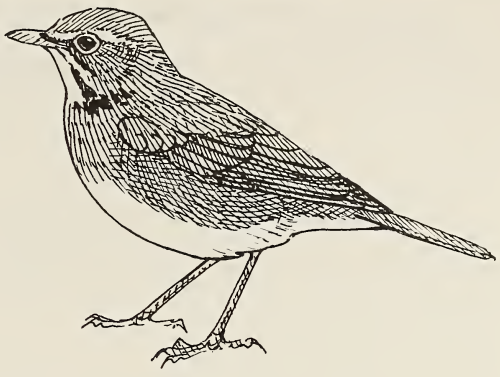
tion, some normally suitable refuges would dry up and become untenable, leading to random movement by all affected birds, as was seen in Mutare in 1992–1993, when species such as Collared Palm-Thrush *Cichladusa arquata*, Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina* and Violet-eared Waxbill *Uraeginthus granatinus* took up residence in surburban gardens.

Under normal conditions, the off-season movement need not be over great distance, perhaps only a few kilometres to the nearest well-vegetated riverbed. In general the movement would be downstream (altitudinal migration is known to occur in some upland breeding species), as at lower altitudes it is warmer during the winter and rivers are more likely to be permanent. I suspect that the lower Shire valley was an off-season refuge for birds from Malawi's highlands, with individuals of many species returning regularly to moult before departing at the start of the next breeding season.

In eastern Zimbabwe some movement toward the border mountains may occur, as the headwaters of the west or south-flowing streams that join the Sabi River tend to be more permanently watered and vegetated than the relatively open savannah to the west. During the drought it appeared that many birds moved upslope to cooler areas, as some species, normally found at slightly lower altitudes, were caught at 1,460–1,550 m and have since disappeared from the trapping sites. Such movement was probably random, as I consider it unlikely to have been a normal dry-season migration, as these species were not caught in previous or subsequent winters, but a movement toward the base of the mountains, eg to La Rochelle, could be normal.

Unfortunately, there is no real evidence from recaptures or recoveries in Zimbabwe to indicate where birds go during dry season or drought. An adult female Miombo Double-collared Sunbird *Nectarinia manoensis*, ringed at La Rochelle (at the base of a low section of border hills) in July 1990 (the first occasion on which I trapped there) and recaught there twice the following year in May–June, was recovered c25 km to the west in October 1991. In May 1991, it had just completed moult. Most breeding occurs in August–November. Perhaps it regularly wintered at La Rochelle and had just returned to its breeding area when it was killed?

A young Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus*, hatched in cOctober 1990 and ringed at La Rochelle two months later, was recovered 61 km away in Mozambique, on the bank of the Pungwe River, after (apparently) colliding with a baobab on 1 January 1996. It is possible that it crossed the low hills east of



Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus* by Mark Andrews

La Rochelle to winter in the warm, well-vegetated Pungwe valley, where there is permanent water. I do not know if it returned to Zimbabwe the following spring, but after summer 1991–1992 no thrushes were seen at La Rochelle until spring 1996.

It appears probable that the thrush spent the drought in the Pungwe valley, whether or not it would have returned to Zimbabwe when conditions improved is also unknown. Unfortunately this species' movements in Zimbabwe require elucidation: at Mitsasa my colour-ringed birds perform undescribed movements, being replaced by unringed birds for a while, before returning several months later, but, under normal conditions, I do have Kurrichane Thrushes in the garden year-round.

I cannot presently examine my Zimbabwe data for occurrence patterns, because, of the eight years during which I have been trapping, only the first year and last 18 months were truly 'normal'. Provided there is no drought in the next 2–4 years and if there is an improvement in the recovery rate (currently almost nil), then it may be possible to demonstrate that birds do move in and out of the trapping areas at different seasons.

Proof of the regular use of dry-season refuges is lacking, but surely must occur. The requirements are available water and relatively thick, mixed vegetation (normally found along watercourses), probably at a relatively low altitude, although, during droughts, birds living nearby would probably utilise stream headwaters in the mountains. Therefore, whilst adequate protection of breeding area habitats is important; areas suitable for dry season use also need protection, especially as the true habits of the species to be protected are unknown.

This involves the prevention of fires, bush clearance and cultivation in marshes and along stream and river banks, both in lowlands and at higher altitude.

However, a law preventing stream bank cultivation in Zimbabwe (and other African countries) is seldom enforced as the need for food and water by people and their livestock means that wetlands and river banks are usually the first areas to be stripped of natural vegetation, especially during droughts.

Nevertheless, the effective conservation of Africa's streams and marshes is not only a prerequisite for clean, healthy rivers and the survival of the human populations which live beside them, it is also essential for the survival of birds.

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The African *Zoothera* thrushes—identification, distribution and some problems with classification

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L'africain muguet *Zoothera*, qui présente un défi aux taxonomistes et à l'observateur de terrain, montre les charactéristiques possibles d'une ancienne famille existante. Ils ont restreint leur répartition dans les blocs restants de la forêt, et plusieurs sont vulnérables, habitant dans des sites détruits et répertorier comme menacé et prémenacé. La majorité des signes aperçus, montrent qu'ils ont un ancêtre commun et qu'ils sont clairement liérs, certains d'entre eux sont peut être plus directement liérs que les précédents ou dans les données de la dernière classifications faite—ceux la'ont été examinés en détail, avec une réévaluation de la position du *Z. oberlaenderi* qui les considérait comme une espèce complète, avec une examination d'une race extrèmement simulaire du *Z. princei* et *Z. camaronensis* qui avait lieu dans une partie d'Afrique centrale, mais on a très peu de connaissances. La spéciation de l'ensemble de l'orange Africain *Zoothera* est discuté et comparé au *Z. citrina* des terres du sud et sudest d'Asie.

In common with many other rainforest dwellers, we know comparatively little of the ecology, life-histories or relationships of the African species of *Zoothera* ground-thrushes. Some taxonomists have argued that it is a matter of speculation as to whether they correctly belong within thè genus or should be placed in *Turdus* or in a more distinctly homogenous grouping of their own. Collectively, the *Zoothera* thrushes are a primitive group which ranges (according to the most recent classification[5]) from the Afrotropics across Asia to Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Micronesia and Australia. Two further species—in North and Central America—are also included within the current grouping but both have been proposed (or to a limited extent are currently recognised) as monotypic genera (*Ixoreus*—Varied Thrush and *Ridgwayia*—Aztec Thrush). Since the *Zoothera* are, in terms of species composition, distributed almost equally through the Old World tropics it is difficult to pinpoint the origins of the genus but it is most probably south-east Asia (east to about Wallacea), since this region currently supports 14 species. The bridge to the New World is unclear, the intervening links having disappeared, or has never existed as the two New World species have no (either living or recently extinct) close relatives. Links and lineage of the African species are equally unclear but similarities between some of those species still extant (Spotted Ground-Thrush *Z. guttata* and Spot-winged Thrush *Z. spiloptera*) suggests that the family may have existed before the continents of Africa and Asia parted.

The genus *Zoothera* currently comprises c36 species all of which are characterised by the distinctive pattern of white underwing-coverts with blackish tips contrasting against the white bases to the secondaries and inner primaries—known previously as the geocichline underwing pattern, hence an earlier name for the genus—*Geocichla*). This underwing pattern reaches its most developed form in White's Thrush *Z. dauma*. In addition they have generally strong or stout, pale coloured legs and feet, and comparatively short or rounded tails; the African species also have white spots at the tips of the wing-coverts. Since most are sedentary it follows that they have fairly short, although not necessarily rounded, wings. Almost all are equally characterised by being shy, secretive, easily overlooked forest-dwelling birds, many of which have little or no song and, of those that do, only one or two are comparable to the musically accomplished songsters that we have come to associate with the *Turdus* (or even more so the extremely adept vocal powers of *Catharus*) genus of thrushes.

Another distinctive feature of the genus *Zoothera* is their relative rarity or sparsity of distribution; very few are regularly encountered even by experienced ornithologists and at least two, both non-African, have either not been seen for some time (Everett's *Z. everetti*) or only a very few times (Guadalcanal *Z. turipavae*); additionally New Britain Thrush *Z. talaseae* of which there are only a handful of specimens, has never been seen in the field by ornithologists. This apparent inability to adapt to habitats other than mature forest is characteristic of a primitive family which has an exact or specific habitat niche or requirement.

Turdus thrushes, by contrast, have successfully adapted from forest birds to a wide range of habitats and, except for the polar regions, have a truly Pan-

continental distribution. More specifically they are (although not entirely so) more arboreal than the ground-thrushes and have more uniform plumage patterns which range from entirely black or brown to dark above and paler below—the latter often accompanied by orange or reddish, a uniform or otherwise unremarkable underwing pattern and slightly longer tails. Vocally they represent one of the most advanced families of songbirds and several species are widely recognised as being highly accomplished singers; moreover they are also known, by even the most sedentary of urban humans who have no other contact with nature, as harbingers of seasonal change by the initiation or curtailment of their songs.

Within Africa the *Zoothera* thrushes are widespread south of the Sahara but confined to evergreen forests, both lowland and montane, with a centre of distribution based on the Equatorial forests of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaïre) and western Uganda. Examination of the known range of plumages demonstrates that all, perhaps with the exception of Spotted Ground-Thrush, are closely related and undoubtedly descended from a common ancestor. Moreover the limited range of differing morphological characters exhibited by the different taxa suggests divergence is fairly recent (within the last 10,000–100,000 years). However, whilst there are recognisable differences between the varying taxa the degree of divergence may not yet have attained a stage where we can be certain of full species status in all cases. Indeed some of those forms currently considered to be full species may, on closer examination, have advanced no further than the subspecific level.

The classification of the African *Zoothera* thrushes used here follows that in *Birds of Africa* which is

- Abyssinian Ground-Thrush *Z. piaggiae* (including *hadii*, *tanganjicae*, *kilimensis* and *rowei* and *ruwenzori*)
- Orange Ground-Thrush *Z. gurneyi* (including *otomitra*, *chuka*, *raineyi* and *disruptans*)
- Crossley's Ground-Thrush *Z. crossleyi* (including *pilettei*)
- Oberlaender's Ground-Thrush *Z. oberlaenderi*
- Black-eared Ground-Thrush *Z. camaronensis* (including *graueri* and *kibalensis*).
- Grey Ground-Thrush *Z. princei* (including *batesi*)
- Spotted Ground-Thrush *Z. guttata* (including *maxis*, *fischeri*, *belcheri* and *lippensi*)

Of these, Abyssinian, Orange and Spotted are relatively widespread in both East and southern Africa although it must be reiterated that their distributions are, of course, restricted to remnant montane forest blocks. Crossley's, Grey and Black-eared are principally West African in distribution, although all three have races which occur in Central Africa; Oberlaender's (the most recently described African *Zoothera*) is restricted to the Albertine Rift forests.

Identification of the African *Zootheras*

With the exception of *Z. guttata*, all of these taxa are extremely similar, some are particularly alike whilst others show more widely divergent characters. All of these (again with the exception of *Z. guttata*) are predominantly orange on the head, face and underparts except the belly and undertail which is white, the upperparts (which also includes the head in some) are variably olive-brown to brown or russet-brown, the tips of the lesser- and greater-coverts have bold white spots at the tips with black to blackish olive bases and the tail is deep or rust-brown. The bills of all (except *Z. guttata*) are uniformly black and the legs pale or fleshy white.

Within this basic pattern there is a degree of variation by which the individual taxa differ. Abyssinian *Z. piaggiae* is characterised by a deep or rich orange on the head and face extending to the crown with a broad white eye-ring, the cheeks, ear-coverts and hindcrown to the nape is brownish orange becoming more olive towards the nape; *Z. p. tanganjicae* is very similar but has the orange on the head deeper or more rufous in tone and this extends across the entire face, crown and nape.

Oberlaender's is also very similar to both the nominate and *tanganjicae* races of Abyssinian, particularly the latter, but is slightly smaller in overall proportions, the head and face are more rufous-orange and it has a diffuse or ill-defined black mark through the eye (interrupting the white eye-ring); the mantle, back and scapulars are darker rust or orange-rufous; the songs of Oberlaender's and *tanganjicae* also differ.

In Crossley's Ground-Thrush the head is deep or dark rufous-orange with a small or reduced eye-ring, the sides of the lower forehead are a pale or light orange-buff but the lores, cheeks and forward ear-coverts are black and, to a lesser extent, the sides of the chin and throat are also tipped black; the olive-brown upperparts are also slightly darker than in Abyssinian and Oberlaender's. To some extent the race *pilettei* of Crossley's is intermediate in characters between this species and Orange Ground-Thrush since it has the face, upper and underparts of Crossley's except that the black extends more fully onto the lower cheeks and across the ear-coverts; the upper forehead, crown and nape is closer to the

plumage of Orange Ground-Thrush which is olive-brown merging across the nape with the rest of the upperparts. Orange Ground-Thrush has the head, cheeks, ear-coverts and centre of forehead to nape dark olive (contrasting with the paler brown mantle and back) but not the sides of the forehead and chin, throat and sides of the neck. As a cautionary note it is essential to note that many of these features are only visible or appreciable in the hand as many of these birds inhabit the dark or poorly lit ground strata of forests.

Black-eared Ground-Thrush has russet-olive brown upperparts (from the forehead back), the face is pale orange-buff with black bars through the eye across the cheeks and rear ear-coverts, and generally duller orange underparts. The race *graueri* is slightly darker or browner on head and upperparts, and has a paler or lighter buff face, the breast and flanks are also duller or tinged browner, and the centre of the breast has a number of broad streaks. The race *kibalensis* is little-known (only two specimens but is otherwise unknown in life): it appears to be intermediate between nominate *camaronensis* and *graueri* but with more extensive rufous-orange on the breast, belly and flanks with the lower belly and undertail whitish.

Finally, Grey Ground-Thrush, as its name implies, is greyer or more grey-brown on the head and upperparts becoming rufous on the scapulars and rump to tail, the base colour of the face is whitish but has the black bars of *camaronensis* through the eye and at the rear of the ear-coverts, the chin and throat are whitish becoming pale orange overlain with greyish on the breast and flanks, and some individuals are more predominantly orange than others. The breast is noticeably, or at least visibly, streaked. The race *batesi* is similar or slightly more olive-brown with less, or no, grey on the upperparts, the basal colour of the face is more buffish white, the throat and breast are tinged browner and with finer, paler or more diffuse breast streaking. *Z. c. graueri* and *batesi* are extremely similar, differing principally in the forehead and crown colour—dark brown in *graueri* and russet-brown in *batesi*; the rest of the upperparts are slightly darker brown in *graueri* and the underparts are almost alike, but perhaps slightly warmer or tinged tawny orange in *graueri* which has several dark central breast streaks (virtually absent in most *batesi*). The lower mandible of *graueri* is all dark or blackish brown, while that of *batesi* is noticeably pale or horn coloured, especially toward the base and similar to nominate *princei*. The wing of *graueri* is shorter on average (with marginal overlap), measuring 95–105 mm (*graueri*) to 101–111 mm (*batesi*).

The exception to most of the above, Spotted Ground-Thrush, with heavy spotting on the underparts, pale brown head and upperparts and pale or whitish tips to the brown tail shares very few of the characteristics of the other African *Zoothera* species. In fact, Spotted has closer similarities to another African thrush—Groundscraper Thrush *Psophocichla litsitpsirupa*—currently considered to constitute a monotypic genus. However, the differences between *Psophocichla* and *Turdus* are not especially great and many authorities consider that the two are synonymous. More specifically, Spotted shows closer similarities to Spot-winged Thrush *Z. spiloptera* of Sri Lanka but without comparison of DNA sequence profiles its exact relationship will not be any clearer.

The taxonomic classification and status of *Z. p. tanganjicae* (*including Z.p. williamsi*), *Z. p. batesi* /*Z. c. graueri*; *Z. oberlaenderi* and *Z. c. kibalensis*

The current grouping of these species in the present arrangement disguises several taxonomic anomalies which have yet to be fully or satisfactorily resolved.

1. Within Abyssinian Ground-Thrush the race *tanganjicae*—Kivu Ground-Thrush—has been proposed as a valid species in its own right[11] largely on the basis of the plumage differences described above. This corrected an earlier placing in Peters' checklist[10] that *tanganjicae* was a synonym for *piaggiae*. However, in their review of African species, Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire[4] reverse this and treat it as conspecific within *piaggiae* as the differences between the nominate race and *tanganjicae*, principally the head to nape colour tones and the wing to tail ratio, are no greater than that elsewhere within the species eg between *rowei* and *piaggiae*. Furthermore, the claimed altitudinal separation is also based on limited evidence and requires confirmation that the two breeding populations are indeed completely allopatric. In addition to promoting *tanganjicae* to species status, Prigogine[13] subsequently proposed that birds in the western Ruwenzori Mountains merited specific status as *ruwenzorii*. *Birds of Africa*[17] did not follow these suggestions (*ruwenzorii* and *tanganjicae* were considered insufficiently distant from *piaggiae* to warrant specific status). *Birds of Africa*[17] gives the range of nominate *piaggiae* as central and south-west Ethiopia, south-east Sudan, north and west Kenya, eastern Uganda, the Rwenzoris (Zaïre / Uganda) and the

Itombwe and Kahuzi Mountains of eastern Zaïre (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) all above 1,900 m. The range of *tanganjicae* lies south-east of this in south-west Uganda, Rwanda and northern Burundi but overlaps with *piaggiae* in the Itombwe and Kahuzi Mountains of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo but is apparently separated altitudinally as it generally occurs below 2,040 m.

The recognition of *ruwenzorii* as subspecifically distinct, as proposed by Prigogine[13], would give rise to an almost unique distribution of two races on the same mountain range, and a third in the adjacent montane forest block. The situation is further confused by Friedmann & Williams[6] who, apparently unaware of the separation of *tanganjicae* (described in 1914) considered that birds occurring in the Ruwenzoris, the Impenetrable Forest and Mt. Muhavura, south-west Uganda were all referable to a new subspecies; *williamsi*. Whilst this may have been an oversight—as the birds they describe are now widely accepted as being *tanganjicae*—it is interesting to note that they describe an adult female collected in the Ruwenzoris at Nyabitaba, at 2,575 m. This is c500 m above the upper limit given for *tanganjicae* by Urban *et al*[17]. More recent information from the Impenetrable Forest (A Twinomujuni pers comm) suggests that whilst *tanganjicae* breeds down to c1,600 m it moves to c2,500 m or higher in the non-breeding season. The question that remains is how closely related are these two taxa and just how far have they diverged in terms of plumage and voice = mate attraction, to be considered specifically distinct.

2. In addition to the similarities of *tanganjicae* to *piaggiae*, there is yet another species—Oberlaender's Ground-Thrush—within the same area with remarkably similar characters to both of these. Oberlaender's and *tanganjicae* occur in the same forests in south-west Uganda but are also apparently separated altitudinally, with Oberlaender's occurring more frequently in lowland forests. Oberlaender's has a significant claim to full species status in that it has one of the finest songs of any of the thrushes and among the *Zoothera* is a particularly accomplished singer, recalling some of the sweet and melodious warbling tones of the Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*. The plumage of Oberlaender's is within the range of variation shown by other subspecies of *piaggiae* and were it not for the fine song probably would not merit species status. The distribution of Oberlaender's has apparently never been extensive and, as with many lowland forest species, it is particularly vulnerable to the exigencies of habitat change. It may now be extirpated from some of the forests within its restricted range ie Bwamba Forest, western Uganda since much of it was destroyed under the re-settlement of native peoples during the Amin regime of the 1970s, and there are no recent records. The precise relationship of Oberlaender's to nominate *piaggiae* and *tanganjicae* is untested; *tanganjicae* appears unresponsive to playback of songs of Oberlaender's and the two taxa are largely allopatric. As such they are clearly diverging from each other but whether they are completely sympatric has yet to be determined.

3. *Z.c. kibalensis* is known only from two male specimens, collected by Glen and Williams at 1,525 m in the Kibale Forest, south-west Uganda in December 1966. Friedmann & Williams[6] considered that these birds were related to *Z. camaronensis graueri* but subsequently Prigogine[13] described them as a new species—*Z. kibalensis* which subsequently became known as Prigogine's Ground-Thrush. Clearly similar to both *Z. camaronensis* and *Z. princei* (especially of the race *batesi*), several authors have considered the specimens to be hybrids between the two taxa. However, as Prigogine[13] was quick to note, Hall & Moreau[8] considered that these two species were not closely related. Nevertheless, in view of the lack of any other records of the species (especially in a relatively well-watched forest reserve such as Kibale), *kibalensis* is best regarded as a race of *Z. camaronensis* as the differences in size and plumage are no greater than the subspecific level of *graueri* which it complements.

4. *Z. princei batesi* / *Z. camaronensis graueri*. The race *batesi* of Grey Ground-Thrush was first described by Bowdler Sharpe in 1905 from a specimen collected by Bates at Efulen, Cameroon. In 1914, Sassi[16] described the race *graueri* from a specimen collected at Moera, west of the Semliki River in what was formerly the north-eastern Congo (subsequently Zaïre) and assumed that it was also a race of Grey Ground-Thrush. This treatment was followed by Mackworth-Praed & Grant[9] who gave the ranges of *batesi* as "Southern Cameroon to the Semliki" and that for *graueri* as "northeastern Congo almost to the Semliki" (the river valley connecting Lake Edward and Lake Albert). However, Chapin[2], Peters[10] and White[18] considered *graueri* synonymous with *batesi*; Urban *et al*[17] treat both under the respective species but make no reference to their similarity. They are, in fact, so similar that the first records of birds collected in Uganda in 1963 and 1966 were considered by their collectors[7] and Britton[1] to be a race of Black-eared

Ground-Thrush (neither Prigogine or Britton considered these African thrushes to be *Zoothera*). The collectors, in discussing the records in Bugoma and Budongo, appear to have arrived at the conclusion that the birds were *batesi* and, although acknowledging that there were no previous records of *batesi* in Uganda, did not substantiate their own records. Although Prigogine[11] maps the occurrence of *batesi* in Bugoma forest (possibly on the basis of the 1963 record, not published until 1966), it was not until 1992 that *batesi* was definitely recorded in the country[5]. Dranzoa[5] describes the observation of one bird, and subsequent collection of two birds in Bwamba forest, and the confusion concerning earlier records.

There are seven specimens of *graueri* from the central African part of its range in museum collections, five of these are from Budongo Forest and two from Bugoma, Uganda. Local guides at Budongo who are, not unsurprisingly, equally adept at identifying birds from calls and songs as well as sight records, regard it as an extremely rare bird with only one or two sightings in the last five years. This may indicate that it is not resident within these forests, however, occurrences of either are likely to be extremely few since *graueri* (in common with *batesi*) has no known song and appears to be entirely silent.

From our limited information on these two very scarce and elusive birds it is entirely possible that they may be morphs of each other and that *graueri* should be treated as a synonym of *batesi* (as proposed by Chapin[2], Peters[10] and White[18]). Until more information becomes available and the affinities of these taxa are established by DNA profiles they should perhaps be regarded as indeterminate. Moreover, future sightings should be described in detail and preferably accompanied by photographs and, wherever possible, blood samples.

By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that another member of the genus, Orange-headed Ground-Thrush *Z. citrina*, from parts of India and south-east Asia, displays an equally wide range of plumage variation, and is currently considered to consist of 12 subspecies. The head, face and underparts vary from pale to deep orange. In particular, a number of races display a similar face pattern (repeated in two other south-east Asian *Zoothera*) to that exhibited by Black-eared and Grey Ground-Thrushes, with broad black stripes through the eye and at the rear of the ear-coverts. However, despite showing this extent of geographical variation, all are considered to have diverged no further than the subspecific level. Compared to this, the levels of subspecific variations shown in the African representatives of the genus *Zoothera* suggest that a consistent approach has not always been applied. In view of this it is entirely possible that we will subsequently be forced to revise our approach to the number of *Zoothera* taxa within Africa.

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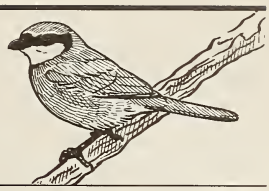
Plate 1 (page 22) clockwise from top left: Crossley's Ground-Thrush *Zoothera crossleyi crossleyi*; *Z. c. pilettei*; *Z. c. kibalensis*; Black-eared Ground-Thrush *Z. cameronensis* (juvenile); Grey Ground-Thrush *Z. p. batesi*; *Z. princei*; Black-eared Ground-Thrush *Z. c. graueri*; *Z. c. cameronensis* (male lower, female upper bird); Crossley's Ground-Thrush *Z. c. crossleyi*. (Clive Byers).

Plate 2 (page 23) clockwise from top left: Abyssinian Ground-Thrush *Z. piaggiae piaggiae*; *Z. piaggiae* (juvenile); *Z. p. tanganjicae*; Orange Ground-Thrush *Z. gurneyi gurneyi*; *Z. gurneyi* (juvenile); *Z. g. otomitra*; Oberlaender's Ground-Thrush *Z. oberlaenderi*; *Z. p. hadii*. (Clive Byers).

Discoveries



First Atlantic record of a Murphy's Petrel *Pterodroma ultima*, at St Helena

Beau W. Rowlands[a] and Trevor Trueman[b]

Le premier *Pterodroma ultima* a être enregistré dans l'atlantique a été observé et photographié à Hooker's Ridge à St Helena le 31 mars 1992. Une description complète a été présenté. L'oiseau a été présent de façon intermittante, pendant au moins deux ans et a construit un nid visible. D'autres informations collectées par les insulaires locaux, nous montre d'autres événennent d'oiseaux. Il n'y a pas sultérieures observations faites par les ornithologistes. L'oiseau était viaisemblablement un migrateur, mais un certains nombres d'auteurs précédents ont spéculé que si ils n'ont pas découvert les populations des oiseaux de mer il est probable qu'ils se soient reproduit à St Helena.

Restricted, as a breeding bird, to the central Pacific Ocean, Murphy's Petrel *Pterodroma ultima* is not included in published lists of birds recorded in the Atlantic[2,5,7–8,10–16]. Early in 1988, on St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean, TT was informed by the late W J (John) Bailey of the repeated occurrence of an unidentified seabird in the Hooper's Ridge area of the island. On 31 March, TT spent one hour, from 07.45 hrs, observing the bird closely, taking photographs, drawing sketches and compiling a detailed description. A full account appears in the BOU Checklist *The Birds of St Helena*[15]. From TT's transparencies, shown at the BOU annual conference at which the above checklist was launched (April 1998), and his account, including the rendition of the calls, the bird was formally identified by M de L Brooke and W R P Bourne as a Murphy's Petrel. Supporting details from TT's account are presented below.

Location and conditions

Hooper's Ridge is a south-west tail of St Helena's central ridge, and runs across the western end of a steep, barren valley leading east to Broad Gut, that in turn runs into Sandy Bay. The ridge and valley fall just within the peripheral arid zone. Bare rock and sandy soil support some sparse vegetation on the north side of the valley and around the three or four houses in the area.

To the west of the ridge, 200 m below, on the south side of the valley lies a small cottage, at that time belonging to Frederick & Thelma March (Plates 22 and 23 in Rowlands *et al*[15]), around which the bird centred its activities. Some bushes, including a dead aloe, surround the cottage which is 3 km west of Sandy Bay at 500 m above sea-level. In flight and at rest, the bird was observed from as little as 3 m through 9 x 35 binoculars. Colour slide photographs were taken with a 500 mm mirror lens and a standard 50 mm lens camera.

Although cloud cover persisted throughout the observation period, the light was very good. There was a strong east-south-east wind (approximately Force 7), but on 18 March, when the bird was also seen, the wind was weaker (Force 4 or 5).

Behaviour

For most of the observation period, the bird flew along roughly the same circular path in an anticlockwise direction relative to a map. From the cottage it soared to the north, then west and then, flying down into the strong east-south-east wind, it would glide, calling, feet dangling, teetering from side-to-side, with the wind ruffling its wing-coverts, approaching a broken off dead aloe, 5–6 m north of the cottage. Calling with feet dangling is commonly seen in Pacific colonies of Murphy's Petrel (M de L Brooke pers comm). It hung in the wind near the tip of the aloe for a few seconds before dropping a little past it and soaring north again. On approximately half of the approaches the bird rubbed its bill against the side of the end of the aloe. The diameter of the circuit was c100 m.

Tethered near the base of the aloe, which was c3 m tall, was an intermittently noisy dog, of which the bird seemed oblivious.

The bird rested in two places. One was a shallow depression in the ground with a few blades of dry grass. According to T March this was its usual resting

place. In the strong winds of 31 March it rested more often and favoured a similar but less hollowed out patch of ground sheltered by some vegetation c30 cm high. Both areas were c20 m above and west of the cottage. When approached to within 4 m the bird walked a few paces into the wind before flying off onto its circuit. T March said she had extricated the bird from a bush near the aloe on 17 March.

Description

See Plates 33 in Rowlands *et al*[15]. The bird's size was assessed from photographs. TT's binoculars were placed where the bird had been sitting, and transparencies of the bird and the binoculars, taken from the same marked spot, were projected and compared. An approximation of the bird's wingspan was made by comparing it with the length of the bird on suitably projected transparencies. The bird was c32 cm long and its wingspan was c81 cm. It was deep-breasted and pot-bellied. The thin, medium-length wings appeared small for its body size. The wings were petrel-shaped, with parallel edges along most of their length and slightly blunt-ended. The tail was of medium length, broad and slightly rounded. The bill was black, short and thick, surmounted by a single tube divided internally by a septum. The eye was dark brown. The legs and part of the feet appeared pale grey against the sky but pink when the bird was perched. Almost all of the outer web and the distal third to half of the inner web of the feet were black.

The head, sides of face and nape were dull greyish brown, affording some contrast with the deep soft grey of the mantle, back, rump and scapulars. This grey was intermediate between dull wet slate and clean dry slate. Darker, brownish feather edges gave a wavy pattern to the mantle and back and a scalloped pattern to the scapulars and lesser-coverts. When sitting, the exposed primaries were wholly dark brownish grey. The tertials were brown-grey with a paler grey distal quarter to one-third. The median-coverts appeared as a row of darker brown feathers. The throat and chin were whitish grey merging to a pale grey area extending laterally to below the eye and onto the forehead, contrasting with the darker head. The underparts were only seen in flight and appeared uniform dull brownish grey, paler than the head and darker than the throat. In flight, the upperwing pattern was of a dark grey leading edge, paler and browner grey secondary-coverts, pale grey bases to primaries and secondaries and darker grey distal ends to flight feathers. The underwing was a dull brownish grey, slightly darker than the body. There were paler grey bases to the inner primaries, forming an indistinct pale patch.

Voice

As the bird approached the dead aloe, and while hanging in the air with its bill near or touching the aloe, it called in two ways. One or both calls were made on each approach, neither predominating. One was a series of c7 mournful *wup* notes, accelerating and rising slightly in pitch, terminating in a drawn out *woooo* descending slightly in pitch. The quality of these notes was reminiscent of but 'harder' than the hoot of a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*. The call may be represented as *wup wup wup upupup woooo*. It lasted c2.5 sec. The other call was a slightly shorter *ki ki ki ki kweeet*, a series of four short notes followed by a more drawn out *kweeet*, that initially descended in pitch and then rose. This call was similar to that of a Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*.

For a similar description of the two calls from the Pacific, ie the Pitcairn islands of Ducie, Henderson and Oeno, see Brooke[8].

Previous records

F & T March and their nearest neighbours, Alfred (Sammy) & Ethel Stevens, resident at Horse Ridge c400 m to the north-west, were uncertain of the details of the bird's return to Hooper's Ridge. They agreed it had been returning for periods of several months, that it had been doing so for at least two years and that it tended to appear in March, but were unsure as to whether it stayed for periods of 6–7 months without a break or disappeared for a month or two in the middle of this period. In the Pitcairn Islands, these are the same months when the species is present at its breeding colonies[7]. While in attendance, it spent most days behaving as described and would do the same on moonlit nights. It would depart for several days at a time, presumably to feed. It had not been seen to take any food on land, but pecked at some low shrubs on occasions when perched. A Stevens had been able to attract the bird by imitating its call, and had caught and photographed it on one occasion in 1987, when it settled on a water tank. A photo of the bird held by A Stevens was seen by N P & M J Ashmole, who noted that it was pale toward the end of the underwing. Also, A Stevens found it was accustomed to resting on an elevated structure of twigs, c25 cm above ground, and had assumed that this was its nest. He also remembered hearing the same calls in Wild Cattle Pound, an area 1.5 km north-west of Hooper's Ridge, c20–30 years previously.

Follow-up

On 18 May 1991, BWR visited Hooper's Ridge. The bird was not present, and both A Stevens and T March

said it had been absent for at least two years. There was no further news of the bird when BWR returned to St Helena again in January–February 1992.

On 28 January 1995, A & E Stevens were visited by N P & M J Ashmole, who gained the following additional information (from the late 1980s) concerning the bird: it ate Deadly Nightshade *Solanum nigrum* berries; colour around eye milky white; feet half-webbed; wingspan 30–34 inches; "sort of Myna bird colour" on back, not black; made 'nest' nearby with twigs on ground under aloe; nest 12 inches across, on top of dirt; bird glides and does not flap; very light weight, less than 1 lb; seen also 30–40 years ago (1955–1965) in 'Suez Canal', a little alley at Frightus, close to Asses Ears in the south.

Identification

The only *Pterodroma* petrel with similar size and plumage is Murphy's Petrel, a species larger than the figures given for the St Helena bird, being 38–41 cm long and having a wingspan of 97 cm[10]. However, when S L Olson and R B Clapp examined TT's photographs and description and compared them with skins of Murphy's Petrel they considered the two to be indistinguishable.

Moreover, the identification by W R P Bourne and M de L Brooke as *P. ultima* is based on the fact that no other medium-sized *Pterodroma* has a similar combination of grey coloration including the underwing, paler chin and inner primaries, and pink legs with dark tips to the toes.

Conclusion

The bird was almost certainly a vagrant. On none of three motorboat trips undertaken around St Helena or landings on offshore islets and stacks did BWR see any petrels other than Madeiran Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma castro*, although he carried out a specific search. Petrels are known to be great wanderers. For example, Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, a bird of the north-west Indian Ocean, has occurred among the Hawaiian Islands, near Lisianski Island[9], and Murphy's Petrel has been discovered to make a northward migration along the west coast of North America reaching the southern Gulf of Alaska[5]. Wandering petrels are also prone to visit seabird colonies[4]. As Murphy's Petrel may be an ally of Mottled Petrel *P. inexpectata*, a Pacific species that feeds to the south (W R P Bourne pers comm) this may explain why it strayed into the Atlantic sector of the Southern Ocean. However, lying only 5–6 km from Hooper's Ridge, the Speery Island group (which includes Upper and Lower Black Rocks, the Needle and Salt Rock, hitherto not visited by ornithologists), may provide a suitable nesting site, as *Pterodroma ultima*, like Trinidade Petrel *P. arminjoniana* of Ilha da Trinidade and Martin Vas, and Round Island, off Mauritius, is not a burrow-nester; there is no suitable substrate on St Helena's outliers for burrows[15]. Ashmole[1], Bourne[3] and Bourne & Loveridge[6] have postulated that a relic population of petrels and shearwaters may be resident and breed undetected on St Helena's steep inaccessible mainland cliffs and offshore islets. Whether a vagrant or a possible breeder, the occurrence of *P. ultima* at St Helena, far beyond its normally recorded range in the Pacific, highlights not only the importance of observations of petrels, but also the need for regular observations of the less accessible parts of oceanic islands.

Acknowledgements

We thank the British Ornithologists' Union for permitting reproduction of a large part of TT's original account, published in BOU Checklist No. 16 as Appendix 8[15]. Both W R P Bourne (University of Aberdeen) and M de L Brooke (University of Cambridge) are thanked for confirming the bird's identity and commenting on an early draft of the manuscript.

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Birding Comoé National Park, Ivory Coast

Volker Salewski

Avec ses 11,500 km², le Parc National de la Comoé est le plus grand parc national de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. En comparaison avec les parcs de l'est et du sud africain, il est toutefois relativement peu connu de la communauté ornithologique. Au total, 494 espèces d'oiseaux et 51 espèces de mammifères, dont plusieurs taxons intéressants, y ont été observées. Le PN de la Comoé est situé sur un plateau granitique se trouvant en majeure partie à 250–300 m d'altitude. Le climat est caractérisé par une saison sèche (de novembre à mars) et une saison des pluies (de mars–avril à octobre) prononcées. L'auteur décrit les espèces d'oiseaux typiques des cinq habitats principaux: la savane, les plaines alluviales, les îlots de forêt dense, les forêts galeries, et les rivières et mares. Il fournit des renseignements sur les aspects logistiques d'une visite au parc, l'hébergement et les meilleurs endroits pour observer les oiseaux.

Birding has become more popular during recent decades and interested amateurs have contributed immense knowledge on birds in areas not regularly visited by scientists. In some areas birding tourism is well developed and plays a vital role in the local economy, helping to protect vulnerable areas and global biodiversity. Nevertheless there are some areas little known to birders and where scientific knowledge is also scarce. Such an area is Comoé National Park (hereafter Comoé). At 11,500 km², it is the largest such park in West Africa. Nonetheless, it is scarcely known outside this area. This is partly due to the lack of developed tourism in most of the region, it takes some effort to get there and facilities are not as good as many tourists from overseas demand. On the other hand, Comoé does not host the large numbers of mammals for which East African parks are famous. In Comoé only 54 species of larger mammals are recorded[11] (69 species are known from Serengeti). In contrast, 494 species of bird have been definitely reported and others are probable[18], 96% of the 517 recorded in Serengeti[19]. These numbers are even more amazing considering the larger size of Serengeti and its higher birder coverage. As many taxa occurring in Comoé are endemic to West Africa, the park, as the largest remaining area of untouched savannah in the region, is a key locality for their protection. The park is known outside West Africa only to a few specialists but not to the wider public whose support is required for its protection. Only knowledge of the material value of the park can create serious awareness; this could be achieved through a stable tourist income.

The Park

Geography, Geology & Climate

Comoé is situated in north-east Ivory Coast near the borders with Burkina Faso and Ghana. It extends from c08°30'–09°40'N and from 03°00'–04°30'W. The 100–200 m-wide Comoé river flows north to south through the park for c230 km and drains most of the area[12]. The park is largely situated on a plateau at 250–300 m. Higher mountain ranges, up to 635 m, are Monts Yévélé and Monts de Tehini in the north and the Monts Potrou and Monts Boutourou in the south-east of the park. Inselbergs are found in several places. The most important villages around the park are Bouna (the park headquarters), Tehini Kafolo, Kong, Gansé and Kakpin.

As in most parts of northern Ivory Coast, the park consists of granitic plateaux. Along the Comoé river metamorphic slates are found. The soils are mostly ferralitic, often with a hard surface crust. They are classified generally as lithosols, the soils in the south-eastern part as ferruginous tropical soils.

Within the park lies the border between two climate zones, the subSudan zone in the south-west and the Sudan zone in the north-east[5]. Both are characterised by the distinct change between the rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season usually lasts from March–April to October for c7–8 months in the subSudan zone and eight months in the Sudan zone. It is characterised by high rainfall and less obvious daily temperature fluctuations. In the south, rainfall decreases in July and peaks in September. Humidity usually exceeds 90%. During the dry season (November–March) there is very little rainfall and the Harmattan, a hot dry wind from the north, blows. Daily temperature fluctuations are usually high and air moisture is below 30%. Annual rainfall varies from 1,100–1,300 mm, the average annual temperature is c27°C[11].

History

Formerly, the park area was sparsely populated due to Onchocercosis, Tsetse flies and insufficient soil fertility. Historically, the Koulango and Lobi tribes arrived

from the north and settled in the area of the park. Now, human population densities at the eastern and southern borders of the park are much higher[9]. Due to demographic development, pressure on the park is increasing from poaching throughout, fishing on the Comoé river, and agriculture and cattle in the northern fringe of the park.

The first moves to protect the area took place in 1926 when an area between the Comoé river and Bouna, to the east, became the Refuge Nord, which, in 1953, became the Réserve Totale de Faune de Bouna. Evacuation of the few settlements within the park commenced in 1953 and was completed c10 years later[9]. On 9 February 1968, the area, together with the Forêt Classé de Kong west of the Comoé river, was declared a National Park. Comoé is currently also a Man and Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site.

Parallel with this development, there arose an interest in the ecology and economic potential of the park. Its fauna was investigated by Geerling & Bokdam in 1968[7], in a study principally focusing on larger mammals. The potential for tourism was investigated by the Steigenberger Consulting GmbH in 1973[13] and was followed by a biological and economic study by Lauginie[9]. These efforts culminated in a biological and ecological analysis as a basis for the development of tourism by the FGU[6] in 1979. An aerial study of mammals in the park was undertaken by Steinhauer in 1977–1981[20]. A permanent research camp of the University of Würzburg, Germany, was established in the south of the park in 1991, and was the base for several avian research projects[2,8]. In spring 1994, a joint project of the Institut für Vogelforschung, Vogelwarte Helgoland, Wilhelmshaven, Germany, and the Institut für Verhaltensphysiologie, Vogelwarte Radolfzell, Germany, commenced studies of the ecology of Palearctic migrants in the park[17]. This project led to the discovery of eight new bird species for the park[16,18] and to a series of other publications dealing with birds in the park[14–18].

Despite these activities, conditions in the park began to deteriorate in the 1980s. The road network has not been repaired since 1987. Other facilities such as guard posts have also not been maintained since then, and poaching, always a problem[9], has increased. In 1990 the most comfortable hotel, the Calao in Gansé, closed. Programmes to reverse this development commenced in 1991 with a relatively ineffective five-year World Bank project. In 1996, the government with further World Bank assistance, provided equipment to all park staff. This had little tangible effect as no capacity-building exercise ensued and few resources were mobilised to finance operation costs. At present, the European Union and GTZ (a German technical co-operation) are planning to finance a two-year WWF technical assistance project. A multi-donor programme is being developed to modify and improve the management of all parks in the country, including Comoé. Another five-year project (GEPRENAF) works with the park's peripheral communities to improve management of natural resources, including wildlife, in a sustainable and profitable way. GEPRENAF started in 1995 in three areas in Comoé: one is in Burkina Faso and the other two are adjacent to the park in Ivory Coast[23].

Habitats and birds

The park's high avian diversity is explained by the number of different habitats. In addition to savannah, there are forests, plains, montane regions and watercourses. Species, usually confined to the rain forest belt to the south or the Sahel zone further north (areas normally several thousand km apart), can be found in close proximity within the park (see below). In the following description only the main habitat types, for which some subdivisions exist, are characterised. For detailed information see Poilecot *et al*[11].

Savannah

Savannah is the main habitat in the park and covers c70% of its area[11]. Several subdivisions are recognised with different dominant tree species on different types of soil. Tree cover is from 2–70%. Dominant tree species are *Crossopteryx febrifuga*, *Daniellia oliveri*, *Burkea africana*, *Terminalia avicennioides*, *Detarium microcarpum* and others. Between trees there is a herb layer up to 2 m high in which grass species such as *Brachiaria jubata* and *Adropogon africanus* are dominant. In some areas there is a less distinct boundary between savannah and savannah forests with *Isoberlinia doka* as the dominant tree species and tree cover reaching 70–90%. Species composition of savannah and savannah forest results from annual bush fires most of them man-made. These fires burn the entire savannah in November–January, from north to south[11].

Typical birds of the herb layer in the savannahs are Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*, Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythroptera* and Singing *Cisticola cantans*, Whistling *C. lateralis* and other cisticolas, which can cause identification problems even for the experienced birder. Nine species of cisticola are known from the park. Typical of the savannah zone are Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*, Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus*,

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1 Dry season fires burn off the herbal layer in the savannah and the trees are without leaves. The gallery forest, in the background, is still green. Dust blown up by the Harmattan, a hot wind from the north, fills the air (Volker Salewski)

2 The major habitats in Comoé Park are the different types of savannah but gallery forest and isolated forests occur in the south (Volker Salewski)

3 During the rainy season the rivers, here the Iringou, fill with sediment-laden water (Volker Salewski)

4 In the rainy season the vegetation is lush and green, and the herb layer reaches up to 2 m in height (Volker Salewski)

5 A young elephant shot by poachers in the Comoé River (Volker Salewski)

6 Breeding colonies of Red-throated Bee-eater *Merops bullocki* are found in savannah throughout the Park (Volker Salewski)

Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser superciliosus*, Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macrourus*, Bush Petronia *Petronia dentata*, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu *Uraeginthus bengalus*, Orange-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda melpoda* and Black-faced Firefinch *Lagonosticta larvata*. Those familiar with calls will detect species such as Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti* and Vieillot's Barbet *Lybius vieilloti* which are inconspicuous if not calling. Raptors typical of savannahs include Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*, and Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis* and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, which often gather near the man-made fires in December–January. Abyssinian Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus abyssinicus* often hunts grasshoppers and other prey close to fires. Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* is here probably represented by transequatorial intra-African migrants: the species breeds in southern Africa except for an isolated record in Kenya. However, information on migration is scarce and relatively unconvincing. Perhaps a nest may one day be discovered in the park, as it was of Black Sparrowhawk *A. melanoleucus*[21]. *A. ovampensis* has been observed in September–January at least, and additional information concerning its phenology in the region would be useful. A typical African migrant breeding in the savannah is Lesser Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chloropterus* which appears in October and apparently breeds in April. Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* can be seen in flocks of up to five birds and heard calling from October–April at least. Another intra-African migrant, which breeds in more northern regions and arrives in the dry season, is Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus*, whilst Red-breasted *Merops bulocki*, Swallow-tailed *M. hirundineus* and Little Bee-eaters *M. pusillus* are year-round residents in the area. Palearctic migrants recorded in the savannah during the European winter include Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*. Of most interest is the enigmatic Emin's Shrike *Lanius gubernator* which was recorded for the first time in the park by Balchin[1], who suggested it might breed here. Its nest is undescribed. Since then, the species has been regularly observed in the south-west of the park. Courtship feeding has been observed and a female with an incubation patch was mist-netted by K Falk in April.

Bowals/alluvial plains

Bowals are flat areas with laterite surface crusts and little soil. According to season their surface may be covered by water. Alluvial plains are often found beside the riparian forest of the Comoé river and separate it from the savannah. Their vegetation cover is often less than 30%[12]. Although of different origin, bowals and alluvial plains have some shared characters, eg lack of trees and bushes, and, during at least some seasons, bare ground.

Passerines attracted by the open areas include Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*, the commonest lark of the area whose 'song', produced by a quick flapping of the wings, is more often heard than the bird seen. Sun *Galerida modesta* and Rufous-rumped Larks *Pinarocorys erythropygia* are also abundant. Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark *Eremopteryx leucotis*, a typical species of the Sahel zone, was discovered recently in the park[16]. Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys* is the most abundant pipit, but there are also records of Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae*.

Non-passerines include breeding Forbes's *Charadrius forbesi* and Wattled Plovers *Vanellus senegallus*. Among the three species of thick-knees recorded in the park, Spotted Dikkop *Burhinus capensis* is found in this habitat, but it is worthwhile to check all thick-knees in open dry areas for Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis* which is usually restricted to water. More obvious is Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, which is usually seen in pairs, and Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*. With luck, a Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius* will be spotted, especially in the north of the park. Families of Four-banded Sandgrouse *Pterocles quadricinctus* are easier to see as are flocks of Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*. Numerous raptor species occur, especially soaring vultures or eagles, of which White-backed *Gyps africanus* and White-headed Vultures *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, and Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* are seen most frequently. It is surprising how often swifts or swallows are discovered, principally during autumn or spring migration, whilst observing such raptors, which would otherwise be overlooked.

Isolated forests

These forest patches, of varying size, are scattered through the savannah and are unconnected to riparian forests. Their origin and dynamics are not yet understood, although two theories have been advanced to explain their presence[10]: one suggests they are remnants of an older forest which covered the entire area before man cleared it, whilst the other regards them as originating from the typical vegetation around old termite mounds which is protected from fire by a ring of bare soil.

Two types of isolated forest exist[12]: wet forests are similar to riparian forests. Dominant tree species are *Cynometra megalophylla*, *Dialium guineense*,

Chlorophora excelsa, *Cola cordifolia* and, at their fringes, *Anogeisus leiocarpus*[12]. Species of the lower vegetation strata include *Oxyanthus racemosus* and *Cassipourea congoensis*.

Dry forests are thought to be an extreme closed wooded savannah[12]. Typical tree species are *Anisogeisus leiocarpus*, *Ceiba pentandra* and *Lannea kerstingii*, all of which are deciduous.

Mühlenberg *et al*[10] discuss the undoubted importance of isolated forests for the forest fauna of West Africa, but no bird species is typically restricted to this forest type. A mixture of species has penetrated these forests from either the savannah or the riparian forest, making one of these forests worth visiting as they are sometimes close to the roads. Hornbills, raptors and Blue-bellied *Coracias cyanogaster* and Broad-billed Rollers *Eurystomus glaucurus* perch in the higher trees, and are more easily seen than in riparian forest. The same is true of species such as Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* and Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicus goertae*. At the end of the rainy season, mixed-species flocks of Yellow-fronted Canary and widowbirds forage on the ground in more open parts of the forests. Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* appears to prefer the open isolated forests[17].

Riparian forest

Riparian forests occur along the Comoé river and its larger tributaries, eg the Iringou. Their width ranges between a few metres and several hundred metres. They are similar to the rainforests of further south but with lower species diversity. Close to the savannah fringe they become more open. Tree heights are higher than in savannah formations with species such as *Cynometra megalophylla*, *Cola cordifolia*, *Manilkara multinervis* and *Ceiba pentandra* reaching over 40 m[12]. Smaller trees, up to 15 m high, include *Dialium guineense*, *Dyospyros abyssinica*, *Oxyanthus racemosus* and *Syzygium guineense*. A herb layer is rarely developed. Like isolated forests, riparian forest is not subject to savannah fires but vegetation cover decreases in the dry season as some species are deciduous.

For species of southern rainforests, the riparian forest serves as a corridor to penetrate into savannah regions which are normally out of their range. It is often difficult to observe many of the cryptic species in the dense forest understorey but if one is familiar with their voices one realises how abundant they are. Thrushes are well represented with Snowy-crowned Robin-chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*, Fire-crested Alethe *Alethe diademata* and Forest Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucosticta* and babblers include Capuchin Babbler *Phyllanthus atripennis* and Puvel's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puveli*, of which the first described nest was found in the park[15], are quite common. Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina* can be found and Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula* was recorded recently[18]. Among non-passerines, the ground-dwelling Forest Francolin *Francolinus lathami* and Crested Guineafowl *Guttera pucherani* are widespread, whereas Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis* is rarer. At night several species of owl can be heard, of which Barred *Glaucidium capense* and Wood Owls *Strix woodfordii* are the most common. The different calls of Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* are especially impressive. Vermiculated Fishing Owl *S. bouvieri* is rumoured to occur, but the species was not accepted by Thiollay[21] or Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire[4] in their Ivory Coast lists.

Rivers and pools

The park's largest river, the Comoé, flows for 230 km within the park. Like its largest tributaries, the Bawé, Boin, Iringou and Kongo, it contains water year-round, although there is no current during the dry season when it is rather a chain of pools. Its width varies from 100–200 m depending on locality and season, and it is usually fringed by riparian forest, which is less developed along smaller rivers. During the rainy season, the current is strong but in the dry season many islands, rocks and gravel areas emerge along its main course. These features are shared by the smaller rivers. During the rainy season many small rivers in the savannah are completely dry but for an occasional temporary waterhole or mudflat. Pools or mares are scattered throughout the savannah and riparian forest. These waterholes fill during the rainy season and the largest ones contain water throughout the year.

During high water levels it is difficult to find species usually associated with water at the rivers. This changes during the dry season when water levels are low. It is always a pleasure to stop at one of the viewpoints along the Comoé and check the riverbed for Cattle *Bubulcus ibis*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Great White Egrets *E. alba*. Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* is also observed regularly and breeds in the park. White-backed Night-Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* was recently discovered here, much further north in the country than previously[18]. Of the ten species of kingfisher, nine can be observed along rivers, eg Pied *Ceryle rudis* and Giant Kingfishers *Megaceryle maxima*. Reed Cormorants *Phalacrocorax africanus* and Senegal Thick-knees often use the

rocks in the river as perches. Many waders of Palearctic origin, eg Common *Actitis hypoleucos* and Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus*, as well as African species, eg Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* use the river. Bateleur and Grasshopper Buzzard regularly visit the river bank to drink, and African Fish Eagle *Haliaaetus vocifer* often perches on trees along the river. In the European winter they are joined by Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus*. Swallows are often observed hunting over the water, especially in the dry season, and African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp* is regularly seen in pairs on the rocks in the river.

The ponds have no distinct avifauna but are most often used, when they are about to dry out, by Cattle Egret, Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*, Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* and various waders.

Visiting Comoé National Park

I do not recommend visiting the park at the height of the rainy season (July–October) because of bad road conditions, high humidity and huge numbers of Tsetse flies. In November–December, there is still much water on some roads and ground vegetation is up to 2 m high. Following the fires in December the view is clear, and between then and April–May is probably the best time to visit. The roads are dry, humidity is low and Tsetse flies absent, although heavy showers can occur from late February. Both the intra-African and Palearctic migrants are also present in this period. In any case, the park is officially closed to tourists from May–December.

How to get there

Public transport

Coaches go to all big cities from the bus stations (eg STIF, UTB) in Abidjan/Adjamé regularly throughout the day (fare Abidjan–Bouaké: 3,000 FCFA in 1998). The south of the park is best reached by public transport from Bouaké. A bushtaxi runs to Nassian or Bouna almost every day, leaving in the morning but with no fixed timetable. The fare to Gansé or Kakpin including hotel and entrances to the park was 3,000 FCFA in 1998. In the rainy season your luggage will probably be soaked if, as is usual, it is stored on the roof. The trip takes c6 hrs. Alternatively you can travel from Bouna or Nassian on the east side of the park. A bushtaxi runs almost every day to Bouaké. From Bouna, it is also possible to reach Kafolo in the north of the park.

By car

The park is reached from Abidjan, via Bouaké and Katiola, on a good paved road as far as Katiola (Abidjan–Katiola: 394 km). From Katiola, a recently paved road leads 86 km to Dabakala, the last big village with a market and petrol station before the park. The journey from Dabakala to Toupé (70 km), where a ferry crosses the Comoé, takes 1.5–2 hrs. Kakpin is reached after a further 16 km. The best way to reach the north of the park from Abidjan is via Bondoukou road (402 km). From there, a gravel road leads, via Nassian and Parhadi, to Kakpin and Gansé. North of Bondoukou, a newly paved road leads to Bouna and the park headquarters, from where a gravel road leads to Kafolo. This journey of 180 km takes 5–7 hrs. The Michelin map of Ivory Coast (1: 100000) is reliable and available in book stores in Abidjan and Bouaké.

By plane

An airstrip is situated c5 km south of Kakpin and is in good condition. To arrange a flight or hire a plane contact the Aeroclub Abidjan (Tel: 278363 or 277508). The airstrip in Kafolo is no longer in use.

Accommodation/Excursions

Several hotels of varying standard are situated around the park. All information was up-to-date in 1998.

Gansé:

Campement Touristique Ask for M. Francis, the owner, at the Katiola ferry. Very basic, round thatched huts for two people with a mosquito net. No showers or toilets. Basic African food on request. Price negotiable. The owner is also a park guide; other guides are available in the village. It is possible to take a 4 km boat trip (each way) which offers the possibility to see waterbirds and hippos. The Hotel Calao, mentioned in older travel guides, closed in 1990. In October 1997, the Haute Commissaire de Tourisme visited Gansé and talked about reopening the hotel, but this possibility appears doubtful.

Kakpin:

Campement Genette Situated inside the park next to the Eaux et Forets station. Round thatched huts for two persons with a shower and toilet in each but no mosquito nets. Electric light (diesel generator) in the tourist season (December–April). Large restaurant with good African food and cold drinks served in the tourist season. Price 5,000 FCFA/hut per night. A car can be hired for trips to the southern parts of the park. Guides available in the village.

Club Kakpin Five km south of Kakpin near the airport. Air conditioned huts with two beds and bathroom, and a comfortable dormitory. Good African and European food, and cold drinks served. Price 10,000 FCFA per night and person excluding meals. An air condi-

tioned car can be hired for trips in the southern parts of the park. Address: Club Kakpin, B.P. 13, Parhadi. Tel: 35 84 70.

Kafolo

Safari Lodge The biggest hotel with 40 comfortable houses for two with bathroom (air conditioned: 21,500 FCFA/night; with ventilator: 16,500 FCFA/night, 40% less during 15 June–15 December). Large restaurant and separate bar. Excursion programme offering following trips: safari, 12,000 FCFA (children under 12 half-price); foot safari, 22,000 FCFA; excursion to a Lobi village, 8,000 FCFA; boat trip to the hippos, 4,000 FCFA (all prices in 1998). Address: Comoé Safari Lodge, B.P. 338, Ferkessedougou.

In the park

Roads

Park maps show a network of roads but most roads cannot be recommended for use. Those which can be used are the roads near the entrances at Gansé, Kakpin or Kafolo. From Kakpin or Gansé, two roads from the south meet near the Lola river. From here, the road leads north and is in driveable condition until Gawi. Elsewhere it is very bad, until you reach Gue Auto 50 km south of Kafolo. Small bridges have largely been washed away and it is necessary to ford most rivers, which is impossible in the rainy season. From Gue Auto the road is in a good condition until the northern park entrance, 10 km west of Kafolo, is reached. In 1996, the Gawi–Bania road 40 km south of Bouna was cleared providing an alternative route to the east. It should be borne in mind that the term "good condition" in the the park is a relative one: big holes in the roads can always occur, standing water may remain long after the rainy season and fallen trees can block the road. A four-wheel-drive car is highly recommended.

Points to visit

Rivers The Comoé can be approached at a series of viewpoints along the principal road through the park. In the south the best is at Plain de Buffles (on maps)/ Plain de Gansé (name given by guides). In the north there is a good view of the river at Gue Auto. In spring 1997, there was a shelter and benches from where a wide part of the river could be seen. It was possible to watch a breeding colony of Wood Ibis *Mycteria ibis* and the first breeding record of Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* was made there[18]. Bigger bridges, over the rivers Yévélé, Boin and Kongo, are excellent to watch swallow species hunting over the water, especially in the dry season. The riparian forest at the mouth of the Iringou, reached by turning onto the small road toward the Comoé south of the bridge, is especially interesting. After 2 km, leave the car at the forest fringe and follow a footpath to the mouth of the Iringou. I have recorded several bird species here which usually have a more southerly range.

Pools In the south, there are pools near Kakpin (not visible from the road), at Plain des Buffles/Plain de Gansé, and between the rivers Lola and Kongo. In the centre of the park there is a mare by the road between Gawi and Bania, c16 km from Gawi. In the north, there is a mare c9 km south of Gué Auto. All offer the possibility to watch waders, herons, storks and Hamerkop from inside the car.

Plains/Bowals Several plains or bowals are situated adjacent to the principal road: Plain des Buffles/Plain de Gansé along the Gansé–Lola road and by the river Lola. Several more can be found along the road through the centre of the park; the largest and most impressive bowal is c12 km south of Gué Auto.

Hills Several hills along the main road provide a good view over the park and are useful for observing soaring raptors. In the south, coming from Gansé, there is one c3 km before the junction with the Kakpin road. This hill is also used as a saline lick where animals take minerals. The most interesting inselbergs I know are next to the road connecting the principal road and the Gawi–Bania road but it is in very bad condition and not recommended. Adjacent to the Gawi–Bania road, there is a hill providing an excellent view 6 km east of Gawi. In the north the road passes outliers of Monts Yévélé. This area is interest-

7 Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus* is the most numerous nightjar in the park (Volker Salewski)

8 Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* searching for prey in the shallow water of a drying pool in the savannah (Volker Salewski)

9 Male Black-winged Red Bishop *Euplectes hordeaceus*: one of the most colourful ploceids in the park's savannah (Volker Salewski)

10 Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* is one of the most numerous Palearctic migrants in the park, and is principally found in open woodland (Volker Salewski)

11 Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* is a typical bird of open plains (Volker Salewski)

12 African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ceyx pictas* is one of ten species of kingfishers found in the park (Volker Salewski)

13 Forest Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucosticta* is a typical bird of dense gallery forest, which is more often heard than seen (Volker Salewski)

14 Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula* was recently discovered in the park (Volker Salewski)

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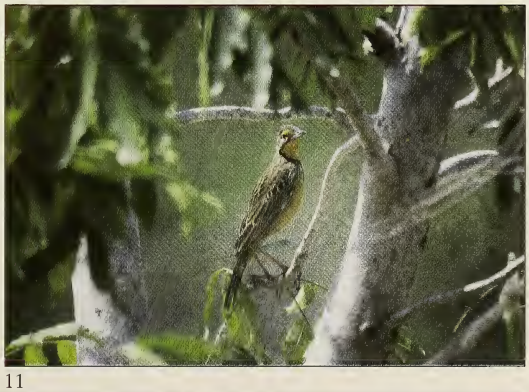

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ing but never take a stroll there without a guide and compass.

Isolated forest Isolated forests are regularly situated by the road in the south of the park. North of the Iringou they become rarer.

Behaviour in the park

The park was created to protect the unique wildlife of the largest savannah region in West Africa. Projects to improve the park, supported by the World Bank, European Union and WWF have commenced and any bad example given by visitors will make this task more difficult. If you enter the park, pay the entrance fee and hire a guide. You will find one in every village with a park entrance. This demonstates to local people the economic benefits of the park. Once inside the park, try to keep your impact on nature to a minimum: do not disturb, catch or collect animals and plants. Stay on the road with your car. Do not light fires and do not drive at night. Take away all your litter. For personal safety do not travel alone, be sure your car is in a good condition, and that you have extra water, food and petrol. Although you may see poachers, this is unlikely as they try to avoid people. There is no personal danger, but never try to chase them or search for their camps. If signs of poaching are found, report them at the next Eaux et Forêts station. Even if it does not lead to direct action, it will demonstate the problem and the interest of visitors in the protection of wildlife. Talk to the local people and the guards about your interests as often as possible.

Future of the park

Poaching has reduced the number of larger mammals, eg antelope species, buffalo and elephant, and therefore the attractiveness of the park to tourists. There is also pressure from the local authorities to permit agriculture in the park, but the main problem is that the authorities in Abidjan have not shown any interest in the area for many years. This is obvious from the condition of the roads and Eaux et Forêts buildings at the park entrances. The wardens are insufficiently equipped and not well paid. Projects are in progress to reverse these problems, but are of limited duration and it is doubtful whether any successes would perpetuate beyond the lifespan of the project. The establishment of tourism, especially ecotourism, in the park is required for a positive impact on the local economy which could convince local people that the park is a valuable resource. As mammals do not occur in the spectacular numbers present in East African parks, birders must represent the tourists most likely to visit the area. Publicity is required to make birders aware of the unique possibility, afforded by Comoé, to experience the birdlife of a West African savannah.

Birders can also contribute to our scientific knowledge of the region which is still far from complete. Several authors[1,3,22] have recorded new species during short visits to the park, and projects in which I have been involved have added eight new species. Williams[22] reported three new species of Palearctic migrant in just two days. Data concerning intra-African migrants could prove even more valuable, for which even phenological information, gained through short visits, can help solve basic questions. Range extensions of some Sahelian species, eg Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark[16,21], possibly due to climate change, also give such observations a particular importance.

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An extensive guide to Comoé for birders is in preparation. It will contain a list of all 494 recorded species and more of which the status is doubtful. Much more detailed information for people visiting the park will also be presented.

Acknowledgements

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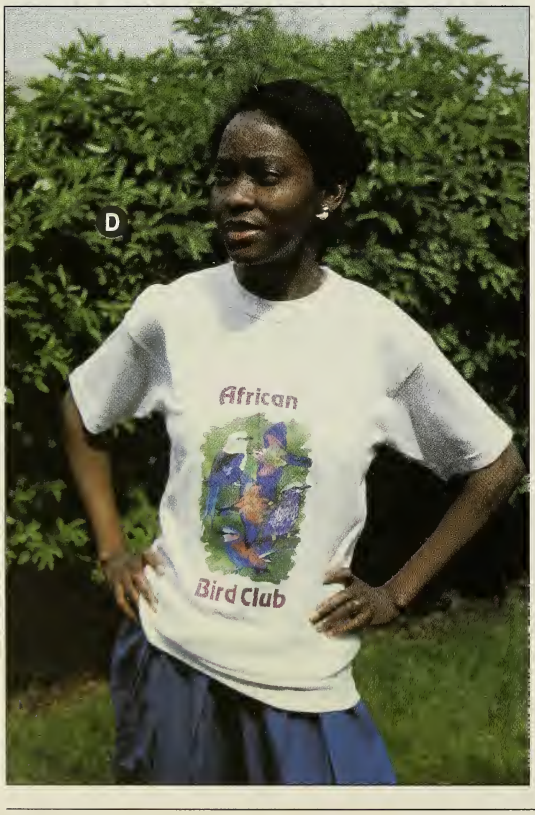
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Birds of Aldabra

Adrian Skerrett

Aldabra, un atoll éloigné dans le sud-ouest de l'archipel des Seychelles, constitue un écosystème quasiment intact. Pour visiter l'île, plusieurs options se présentent, quoique aucune ne soit peu coûteuse. L'atoll est riche en flore et faune endémiques, bien que des deux espèces d'oiseaux, la Fauvette d'Aldabra *Nesillas aldabranus* et le Drongo d'Aldabra *Dicrurus aldabranus*, la première ait probablement disparu. La population du drongo est actuellement estimée à 1,500 individus. L'élévation de plusieurs autres taxons au rang d'espèce pourrait se justifier, comme par exemple dans les cas du Râle d'Aldabra *Dryolimnas cuvieri aldabranus*, du Foudi de forêt d'Aldabra *Foudia eminentissima aldabrana* et de l'Ibis sacré *Threskiornis aethiopicus abbotti*. Huit autres espèces terrestres sont présentes, mais elles ont été peu étudées jusqu'ici. Plusieurs espèces d'oiseaux de mer nichent en nombres importants sur l'atoll, le Flamant rose *Phoenicopterus ruber* y niche également, comme prouvé récemment, et un certain nombre d'espèces occasionnelles observées nulle part ailleurs aux Seychelles y ont été notées. Les espèces endémiques et les oiseaux de mer nicheurs sont menacés par des prédateurs, tels que chèvres, chats et rats, le braconnage et l'introduction d'oiseaux exotiques par le personnel de la mine de phosphate de l'île voisine d'Assomption, tels que le Bulbul orphée *Pycnonotus jocusus* et le Foudi de forêt malgache *Foudia eminentissima*. Ces espèces pourraient supplanter les taxons endémiques ou, dans le cas du foudi, s'apparier au foudi local et former une population hybride. Toutefois, le gouvernement seychellois adoptant une attitude positive envers la conservation de la nature, l'on peut espérer qu'Aldabra demeurera une île sans trop d'espèces introduites.

Due to its remote location, lack of freshwater, dense scrub, difficult terrain and no small degree of good fortune, Aldabra's ecosystem has survived relatively intact. Turtles, tortoises, some birds and other resources were once heavily exploited. Aldabra's darkest hour came in the mid-1960s when plans were hatched to turn the atoll into a gigantic aircraft carrier. The campaign to save Aldabra, spear-headed by the UK's Royal Society, was probably the first successful, major international conservation campaign. The proponents of the military option were not used to this and attempted to fight back using ridicule. Denis Healey of Britain's Labour Government declared "As I understand, the island of Aldabra is inhabited—like Her Majesty's Opposition Front Bench—by giant turtles, frigate birds and boobies. Nevertheless, it may well provide useful facilities for aircraft"[1]. However, Sir Julian Huxley offered a wider vision: "the animals and plants of Aldabra...can fairly claim to have international value and as such, the owner into whose hand they happen to have fallen, surely has a responsibility to exercise some degree of limitation of his activities in their favour"[1].

The 1967 devaluation of sterling was used as the reason to back down. Magnanimous in defeat, the UK government (then colonial masters of Seychelles), passed the lease of Aldabra to the Royal Society. A scientific research station was established on the atoll. Dubbed "the land that time forgot" during the media campaign, the Royal Society's work made Aldabra one of the best researched atoll ecosystems in the world. Subsequently, management responsibility passed to the Seychelles Islands Foundation, founded by presidential decree in 1979. The atoll which comprises approximately one-third of Seychelles' total land area, became a nature reserve. In 1982, it became Seychelles' first World Heritage Site.

Location

Aldabra is situated in the extreme south-west of the Seychelles archipelago, 600 km east of Africa, 400 km north-west of Madagascar and 1,100 km south-west of Seychelles main population centre, Mahé in the granitic group of islands. The atoll of Aldabra comprises four main islands—Grande Terre, Malabar, Polymnie and Picard—and a number of smaller lagoon islands and islets. The Aldabra group comprises Aldabra atoll and with the neighbouring islands of similar age and structure—Assumption, Astove and Cosmoledo atolls.

Getting there

For many years, Royal Society staff on Aldabra needed to employ devious techniques, such as hitching a lift on supertankers from the Middle East, to reach Aldabra. For others the arrival of cruiseships in the western Indian Ocean were an easier, if more expensive, alternative. This is an excellent way to make a short

visit to Aldabra provided you choose the right ship. The best cruiseship for expedition travel in the region is currently *Caledonian Star* with its team of expert Zodiac drivers and leaders who know the atoll and its wildlife intimately.

For a longer stay, it was formerly necessary to charter a yacht from Mahé for upwards of US$12,000, allowing c6 days at sea for the return journey. Today, there is one live-aboard motor yacht—the *Indian Ocean Explorer*—based at Aldabra for part of the year, which takes visitors to and from neighbouring Assumption for the flight to Mahé. The price per person in 1998 on a double occupancy basis was US$300 per day plus flight costs. Another live-aboard—the catamaran *Aldabra*—takes the scenic route between Mahé and Aldabra.

For landlubbers, there is still hope. In 1997, through funding from the World Bank and Seychelles Island Foundation, the old research station, constructed by the Royal Society almost 30 years earlier, was replaced with an attractive log-frame research facility which includes an accommodation block of six twin rooms, each with en suite toilet and shower. This is principally for the use of visiting scientists, but if there is space it is available for private hire. The cost at SR2,000 (cUS$400) per twin or SR1,500 (US$300) per single room per day, which includes guiding services of the resident warden and research officer, is still not cheap, but this is not an average package deal.

The birds

Endemics are rarely found on remote coral atolls due to their relatively short geological history. Just 4,000 years ago, sea-levels in the western Indian Ocean were several metres higher than at present. At this time, there was just one point of land between Seychelles granitic islands—1,000 km to the north-east—and the Aldabra group; the raised coral platform island of St. Pierre. Subsequently, a change in ocean currents led to a localised fall in sea-levels and the emergence of three coral island groups: the Amirantes, the Alphonse group and the Farquhar group.

Given their short history, it is unsurprising that none of the Amirantes, Alphonse group or Farquhar group have any endemic birds. A race of Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata saturata* (synonym *aldabrana*, a misnomer) once occupied some of the Amirantes and a blue pigeon (possibly a race of Comoro Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas sganzini*) was found in the Farquhar group[29], but both are now extinct. Today, the only landbirds are introduced species.

Aldabra is the world's largest raised coral atoll. Whereas most coral islands, including those of Amirantes, Alphonse and Farquhar do not rise above 3 m, Aldabra is higher, with two platforms at 4 m and 8 m. It has undergone several emergences and submergences during its history, but due to its height Aldabra's last submergence was probably c125,000 years ago.

Given the antiquity of Aldabra, it is perhaps unsurprising that levels of endemism among its flora and fauna are high. Almost all of the landbird species belong to an endemic taxon. Of 176 flowering plants, c40 (22%), are confined to the Aldabra group. By contrast, the coral cay of Bird Island, close to the granitic group, has just 30 flowering plants in total, none of which are endemic[2]. Endemic insects too, are well represented: c38% of the estimated 1,000 species. Aldabra's most famous species is the endemic Aldabra Giant Tortoise. The estimated population in 1997 was 100,000[11], perhaps 90% of the world population of all giant tortoise species.

Sadly, one endemic bird species—Aldabra Warbler *Nesillas aldabranus*—is probably now extinct. Undiscovered until 1967, except for one record of a bird heard singing, it was only ever known from a 10 ha coastal strip (2 km x 50 m) at the west end of Malabar. A 1974–75 study located five birds: three males and two females[18] and the last sighting, of a single male, was in 1983[13]. At this time it was described as "...almost certainly the rarest, most restricted and most highly threatened species of bird in the world"[5], but by 1994 it was considered extinct[6]. It is possible the species might still survive in little-visited and impenetrable south-west Grande Terre, but the chances of this appear increasingly remote. Extinction may have been natural, but rats are also prime suspects given the high level of predation experienced by other species[22].

Aldabra Drongo *Dicrurus aldabranus* has the distinction of being the sole undisputed endemic bird species still certainly extant. It is relatively common throughout the atoll with an estimated population of 1,500. Related to the Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus* of Madagascar[3] (the original source of all Aldabra's landbirds), it is accorded species status on the basis of differences in plumage and call.

Aldabra awaits a full genetic study of its avifauna. Arguments exist for raising other taxa, currently considered races, to species level. One such is White-throated Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri aldabranus*, which has been considered specifically distinct, as Aldabra Rail *Dryolimnas aldabranus*[25]. The Aldabra Rail's differences to Madagascar stock clearly go beyond habitat. It has evolved in geographic isolation and its wings are defunct, giving it the dubious distinc-

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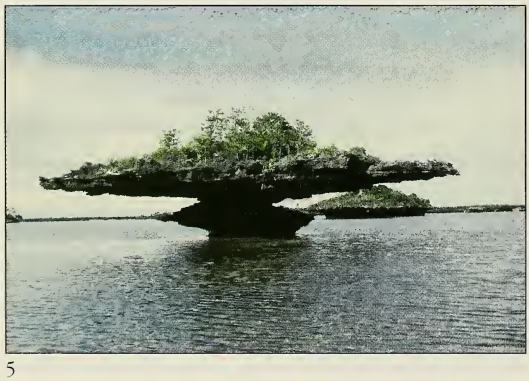

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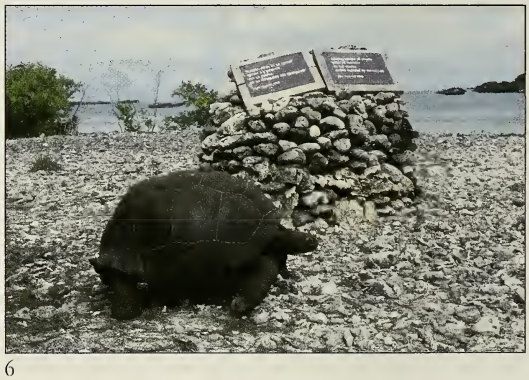

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1 Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*
2 Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus abbotti*
3 Aldabra Fody *Foudia aldabrana*
4 White-throated (Aldabra) Rail *Dryolimnas aldabranus*
5 Mushroom Islet
6 World Heritage Site Monument

(All photos Adrian Skerrett)

tion of being the only surviving flightless bird of the Indian Ocean region. Morphologically it is not obviously distinct, but specific status would give this remarkable taxon a higher conservation profile.

A second candidate is Forest Fody *Foudia eminentissima aldabrana*, which was treated as Aldabra Fody *Foudia aldabrana* by Sinclair & Langrand[25]. Fodies are confined to the western Indian Ocean. The genus comprises 5–6 sexually dimorphic species which vary considerably in plumage and in the size and the shape of the bill (according to diet)[12]. Aldabra Fody is particularly distinctive, males being the most attractive of all fodies, possessing a bright

scarlet head, neck and upper breast, which is sharply demarcated from the sulphur yellow belly. Its huge bill is remarkable, even relative to its large body size. Forest Fody *F. eminentissima* of Madagascar is smaller, has a proportionately smaller bill, a grey belly and flanks, and is thus considerably less striking than Aldabra Fody. The taxon confined to Aldabra has a catholic diet, including insects, seeds and nectar (its tongue exhibits a degree of adaptation to a nectar diet). Its large bill is probably the result of adaptive radiation to exploit all available food sources on Aldabra in competition with other landbirds.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* is currently considered to comprise three subspecies: nominate *aethiopicus* in Africa, *bernieri* in Madagascar and *abbotti* in Aldabra. The ibis of Aldabra and Madagascar are very similar. Both are smaller than the nominate race, the bills are more slender and the tips to the primaries and secondaries are white; these are black in the nominate race[14]. The iris of *abbotti* is blue and that of *bernieri* white, both considerably paler than the brown iris of the nominate race. It is possible that Madagascan and Aldabran birds merit specific status. If so, the name *bernieri* has priority and Madagascar Sacred Ibis *T. bernieri* has two races: nominate *bernieri* in Madagascar and *abbotti* on Aldabra. This would have immediate conservation implications. Madagascar Sacred Ibis is probably one of the most threatened species in the Afrotropics. Indeed, Aldabra with 100–250 pairs may prove a vital stronghold.

The case for elevating other taxa to species is less obvious. Souimanga Sunbird *Nectarinia souimanga aldabrensis*, Aldabra's most common landbird, is little different morphologically to the nominate race of Madagascar, although this is not true for the sunbirds on other islands in the Aldabra group. These are larger and have much darker underparts (almost black in *buchenorum* of Cosmoledo and Astove, and dark brown in *abbotti* of Assumption); birds on Madagascar and Aldabra have a pale yellow belly. If this is a separate species, *abbotti* has priority, and the taxon could be known as Abbott's Sunbird *Nectarinia abbotti*.

Aldabra atoll boasts a further seven endemic races of landbird: Madagascar Kestrel *Falco newtoni aldabranus*, Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata coppingeri*, Comoro Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas sganzini minor*, Madagascar Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis rostratus*, Madagascar Nightjar *Caprimulgus madagascariensis aldabrensis*, Madagascar Coucal *Centropus toulou insularis* and Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatana aldabrensis*. The case for subspecific recognition of the kestrel is probably weak, there being no obvious morphological differences between birds on Aldabra and Madagascar. However, it is the rarest surviving landbird of the Aldabra group, with probably fewer than 50 pairs. Comparative genetic analysis and a taxonomic review of all the endemic subspecies of the Aldabra group, taking into account voice, behaviour and ecology, is certainly required.

Elsewhere in the group, Madagascar Turtle Dove was rediscovered on Cosmoledo in small numbers in 1982, having been considered extinct[16]. Cosmoledo has one other endemic subspecies—Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatana menaiensis*. However, many species on Cosmoledo, Astove and Assumption failed to survive long after the arrival of man.

The only non-endemic landbird on Aldabra is Pied Crow *Corvus alba*. Crows have been fingered as a menace by some who claim they arrived at Aldabra in the wake of man. Crows have had a bad press in Seychelles, with a well-publicised and successful campaign to eradicate the introduced Indian House Crow *C. splendens*. However, written accounts of Aldabra mention Pied Crow in the group as early as 1878[7] and in 1836, long before human settlement, at Astove[28]. The species' habit of soaring at altitude to locate food sources may have led to continued genetic inflow along the chain of islands from Madagascar to the Comoros, explaining the lack of subspeciation.

Aldabra's capacity to surprise was vividly demonstrated in 1995 when evidence of breeding Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* was discovered[4]. Flocks of up to 500 birds had been seen in the past (smaller numbers are more common) and breeding had been suspected by some authors, although others considered the species migratory. Breeding was proven again in 1996. Aldabra is the world's only coral atoll where the species breeds, and one of only two oceanic sites in the world: the other is the Galápagos.

Aldabra is also the only oceanic breeding site for Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* which survives in a tiny colony of 6–10 pairs. Two other species—Swift *S. bergii* and Black-naped Terns *S. sumatrana*—breed in greater numbers here than anywhere else in Seychelles, but numbers of Fairy Tern *Gygis alba* and Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* are considerably smaller than further east in Seychelles[8].

The logo of Seychelles Islands Foundation is a frigatebird. Two species—Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* and Lesser Frigatebird *F. ariel*—breed in separate colonies of 4,000 pairs and 6,000 pairs[21]. With non-breeding birds (frigatebirds take seven months to fledge followed by up to 18 months of post-fledging parental care), the total population of frigatebirds exceeds 30,000. This is the world's sec-

ond largest population after McKean Island in the Pacific Ocean.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* breeds alongside the frigatebirds, nesting in mangroves. Boobies are harried by frigatebirds at sea in order to steal nesting material and food. In some parts of the world robbing boobies may be an important food source, but this does not appear to be the case at Aldabra, where frigatebirds greatly outnumber boobies[9].

On rat-free islets, Red-tailed *Phaethon rubricauda* and White-tailed Tropicbirds *P. lepturus* breed with c2,000 pairs of each[10]. Some islets also host Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri colstoni*; a race described in 1996 (and apparently confined to Aldabra, although it may breed elsewhere, perhaps on Cosmoledo)[24].

The eastern islands and the atoll and neighbouring lagoon coast of Grand Terre is the stronghold of the globally threatened Madagascar Pond Heron *Ardeola idae*. Like the ibis, it is threatened in Madagascar, which adds importance to the protected status of its habitat in Aldabra despite the relatively small number of breeding pairs (20–50).

The lagoon dries extensively at low tide and is an important feeding area for migrant waders. Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola* are commonly reported in flocks of up to 1,000 birds. Dimorphic (Little) Egret *Egretta (garzetta) dimorpha*, which breeds on the atoll is also common along the shoreline.

Several vagrants accepted by Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) have been recorded in the Aldabra group and nowhere else in Seychelles, including White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, and Red-backed *Lanius collurio* and Lesser Grey Shrikes *L. minor*[27]. Some species which are vagrants elsewhere in Seychelles are more regular in the Aldabra group and may prove to be annual in occurrence, notably Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*, Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. Bird recording in Seychelles is still in its infancy. However, in one study Phillips *et al*[17] analysed 300 records of 52 species of migrant landbirds accepted by SBRC up to 1995. They found that, as expected, there was an October–November peak in records throughout Seychelles, but, more surprisingly, a large March peak in the Aldabra group not evident elsewhere. It is possible Aldabra lies on the normal migration route of some species.

Threats

Human presence is now restricted to a small population at the research station on Picard, but earlier residents brought with them the usual introduced predators. Goats, introduced to provide food for passing ships, have now been eradicated except on Grand Terre. However, the size of this island makes total eradication extremely difficult.

Cats are present, although not on islands supporting populations of Aldabra Rail. The recent elimination of cats from Picard hopefully will pave the way for the re-introduction of rails to the island. Rats are a major threat, with some bird species restricted to tiny rat-free islets. Rats take a heavy toll on landbirds such as Aldabra Fody. Eradication from some islands is desirable, but the logistics will make it difficult.

Poaching is a problem, although probably not of major concern for Aldabra's avifauna at present. This threat was certainly greater in the past, when birds were seen as another exploitable asset. With the advent of tourism, disturbance could create difficulties. Seychelles Islands Foundation have designated areas where tourism is permitted and can be controlled. A greater problem comes from unauthorised access, with boats sometimes arriving illegally from Comoros.

Possibly the biggest threat to Aldabra's avifauna is on Assumption. It was here that, in the 1970s, Mauritian staff of a phosphate mining company based on the island introduced a number of exotic bird species from their home country[20]. These include Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocusus* which, based on transect data, numbered 1,250–1,500 in 1997 (G. Rocamora unpubl.). Its spread on Assumption suggests it would do well on Aldabra, competing with the endemic avifauna[23].

Madagascar Fody, another introduction, could threaten the Aldabra Fody through hybridisation. This was demonstrated recently, when a lone Seychelles Fody *Foudia sechellarum* arrived on Aride Island in the granitic islands, became established within a population of Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis* and produced two hybrid offspring[15].

Two other species introduced on Assumption in the 1970s—Barred Ground Dove *Geopelia striata* and Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus*—are also established, although their numbers appear low. To compound the problem a pair of Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* introduced in c1990–91 had increased to 69 birds by 1994[26]. Aldabra is unusual for a tropical island of its size in having no introduced avifauna. It would be as well to keep it that way. Indeed, a proposal to effect the removal of introduced avifauna to be followed by the reintroduction of Aldabran avifauna to Assumption has been made[19]. Sadly, despite the support of the Royal Society and Seychelles Islands Foundation,

the plan has failed to convince the Seychelles Government of the seriousness of the problem except to gain support for the eradication of feral pigeons on the island (completed in 1996).

Nonetheless, the Seychelles Government has taken its custodianship of Aldabra very seriously. It deserves credit for setting aside such a large portion of its small land mass as a nature reserve. Over 40% of Seychelles has been designated as reserves, National Parks or protected areas. In particular, Seychelles deserves credit for securing the financial future of Seychelles Islands Foundation by handing over management of the country's second World Heritage Site—Vallée de Mai on Praslin—to the Foundation. Unlike Aldabra, Vallée de Mai has low overheads and high tourism income. Vallée de Mai's profits fund the huge expenses of running Aldabra. Thus, the prospects for the future of the birds of Aldabra and the rest of its fauna and flora are considerably brighter than in many equally fragile ecosystems elsewhere in the world.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Ian Sinclair, whose observations first alerted me to the case to elevate Madagascar Sacred Ibis, Aldabra Rail, Aldabra Fody and Abbott's Sunbird to species status, and to Gérard Rocamora for valuable comments on the first draft of this article.

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Information obtained from nine road-killed Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* in The Gambia, in winters 1990–1997

Clive R. Barlow and Gordon Gale

Des données sur neuf Engoulevents à collier roux *Caprimulgus ruficollis* de la sous-espèce nominale, tués et ramassés sur les routes de Gambie entre le 14 novembre 1990 et le 12 novembre 1997, sont présentées sous forme de tableau. Les localités où les oiseaux ont été trouvés sont indiquées sur une carte, tandis que des photos illustrent les points d'identification saillants. Ces photos, ainsi que d'autres diapositives traitant du même sujet, sont archivées à l'adresse au Royaume Uni indiquée ci-dessous. Une peau a été déposée au British Natural History Museum, Tring, et plusieurs autres au Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan, USA.

Prior to Barlow *et al*[1] there were no published records of Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* in The Gambia. The species was accepted onto the national list in October 1994 on the basis of a road-kill near Georgetown in Central River Division on 14 November 1990. The specimen is retained at the British Museum (Natural History) at Tring. Three records (two in November and one from January) from northern Senegal involve both the nominate European and paler, greyer *desertorum* race of North Africa[7,8]. The main wintering grounds are considered to be 16–17°N in Mali, where probably both subspecies are common and widespread in November–March[5]. Other West African records are from coastal Mauritania (in May and October–November)[5]; Ghana (one record in March 1901 referred to as (North African) Red-necked Nightjar)[5,6]; Côte d'Ivoire (several recent records in January–March and also November[5,9,10].

The Gambian records

Nine dead Red-necked Nightjars were found on roads in three of the five administrative divisions of The Gambia, in November 1990–November 1997. All were found in October–January (with most in November) and were south of the Gambia River (see map). They were photographed while fresh, then frozen when facilities were available before return to Banjul, or sometimes several days later. Specimens were prepared, either as a skin, partial skin or skeleton. Badly damaged corpses had their wings removed, spread and dried. All defrosted and bruised birds proved difficult to prepare as skins.

Basic biometric data were recorded when relevant mensural equipment was available in the field. Some individuals were found with the tail missing. (One bird (Specimen C) was photographed, but the partial skin was stolen by a cat while being sun-dried at a river camp.) Based on plumage characteristics[4],

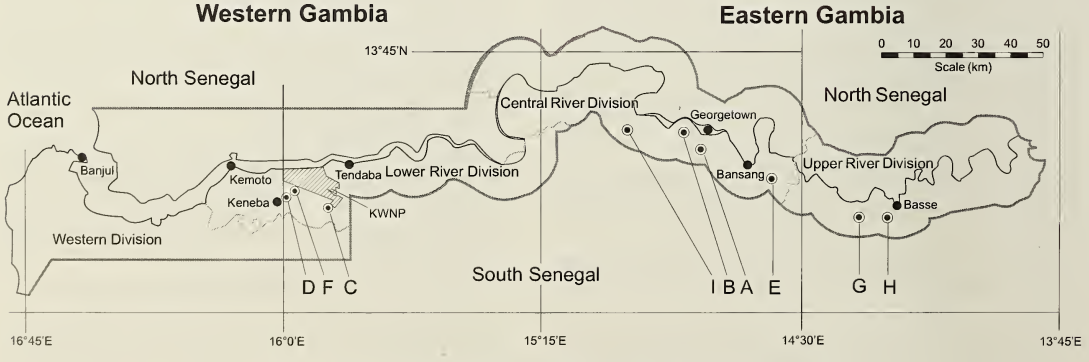


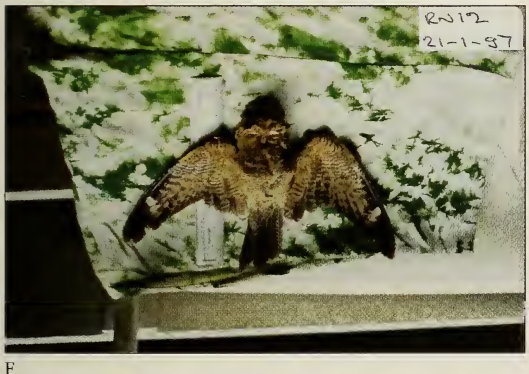
Figure 1. Red-necked Nightjar road-kills in The Gambia (1990–1997)

A

B

D

E



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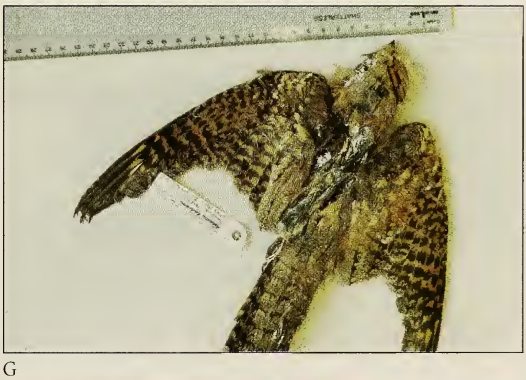

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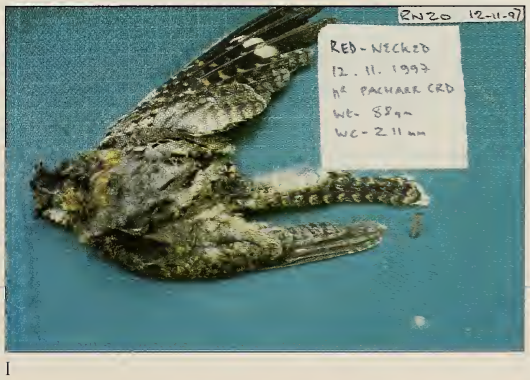

I

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* specimens from The Gambia. (Clive R. Barlow).

Table 1. Details of Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* road-kills in The Gambia

Specimen	Date	Div	Grid Reference	WC (mm)	Wt (g)	Notes
A	14 November 1990	CRD	14°45'E 13°33'N near Georgetown	204	-	Wing-spots buffy. Skin at BMNH, Tring
B	31 October 1996	CRD	14°50'E 13°36'N 288 km east of Banjul	203	-	Wing-spots buffy. No white outertail-tips. Tail 165 mm. Skin.
C	23 November 1996	LRD	15°50'E 13°20'N 145 km east of Banjul	-	-	Skin stolen by cat
D	23 November 1996	LRD	15°59'E 13°20'N near Keneba	205	-	Wing-spots white. Tail 156 mm. White outertail-tips 28 mm. Skin.
E	22 December 1996	CRD	14°33'E 13°20'N near Bansang	201	-	Wing-spots off white. No white outertail-tips. Tail 154 mm. Skin.
F	21 January 1997	LRD	15°58'E 13°20'N near Jali	196	78	Wing-spots off-white. Partial skin.
G	11 November 1997	URD	14°23'E 13°16'N 20 km west of Basse	208	85	Wing-spots white. Wings only.
H	11 November 1997	URD	14°22'E 13°18'N near Sotuma Samba Foy	210	89	Wing-spots off-white. White outertail-tips 30 mm. Skeleton.
I	12 November 1997	CRD	14°58'E 13°33'N near Jakhaly-Pacharr	211	88	Wing-spots buffy. Skeleton.

Abbreviations: BMNH = British Museum (Natural History), Tring; CRD = Central River Division; LRD = Lower River Division; URD = Upper River Division; Div = Division; KWNP = Kiang West National Park; WC = wing-chord

all of the Gambian records are considered to be of the nominate race. Weights, where given, include the specimen with a full and packed, thus heavy, stomach. There were no obvious gonadal developments in any birds dissected.

Discussion

Red-necked Nightjar is a candidate for treatment as a threatened species[3], but has not been subsequently listed as such[2]. There are few passage observations south of the breeding range and its winter ecology is almost unknown; the main breeding areas of the nominate race are Spain and Portugal[4]. Systematic nocturnal survey work from mid-October–mid-November in the eastern districts of The Gambia is recommended in order to quantify Red-necked Nightjar movement through the country. This period coincides with the post-rain season peak of insect abundance. During this period considerable numbers of Standard-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis climacurus* are also killed on roads and smaller numbers of Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus* are also found. Of the ten species of nightjar recorded in Senegambia[1], only European Nightjar *C. europaeus* is likely to be confused with Red-necked Nightjar. In the period under discussion, no records of European Nightjar have been confirmed in The Gambia. Similarly, despite occasional brief observations of large nightjars, no live records of Red-necked Nightjar have been confirmed.

In the future we should like to co-operate with individuals or institutions interested in identifying the stomach contents of road-killed nightjars in The Gambia. The dried insects can be posted to the UK address below.

With the co-operation of The Director of The Department of Parks Management and Wildlife of The Government of The Gambia, specimens B–I have been donated to The University of Michigan, Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1079, USA.

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lated Hi-8 video footage of several of the specimens. We are most grateful to the many birders and drivers travelling with us on organised tours for their patience whilst we collected nightjars and other road-killed birds.

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Additional surveys of Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani* in the tropical rainforests of Uganda

Christine Dranzoa[a], Julius Nkwasire[a] and Eric Sande[b]

Une vue générale du *Francolinus nahani* a été faite aux forêts de Bugoma, Kibale et Mabira en Fevrier–Mai 1998 et depuis six semaines en Aout–Octobre 1998 dans la forêt de Mabira. La réécoute de l'enregistrement des sons formait en général la principale methode. Des réponses positives ont été obtenu dans la forêt de Mabira et Bugoma, mais pas pour la forêt de Kibale. Plus de 30 différents sites repartis dans les différents types de forêts des trois aires etudiée ont été visités. La taille des groupes sont rangés entre 2–5 individus. Les espèces sont chassées par les communautés locales autour de la forêt. Davatanges de recherches; pour la préservation de la situation, des exigences écologiques et le controle de l'impact humain, et autre biologique et socialculturel données du *Francolinus nahani* ont été fortement recommandés.

Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani* is known from five forests in Uganda, but, despite recent contributions eg by Dranzoa *et al*[2] and Plumptre[3], very little is known of its basic ecology and conservation status. Efforts to obtain additional data on the species commenced in 1996 (see Dranzoa *et al*[2]). The present survey continued our assessment of the response of the species to call playback, which will hopefully prove to be an adequate census method for longer term monitoring and ecological studies, and sought to assess the species' current status in Bugoma, Mabira and Kibale forests.

Study areas

Bugoma, Kibale and Mabira forests are all part of the remnant lowland tropical rainforests in Uganda, and

Top right & left: Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani* (Christine Dranzoa)

Bottom: Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani* nest and eggs, Budongo, 27 October 1997 (Eric Saude)

are surrounded by agricultural settlements, industrial development and urban areas.

Bugoma is a fragmented forest covering 401 km^2 and with an altitudinal range of 990–1,300 m. Approximately half of the forested area is dominated by *Cynometra alexandri*, one third is mixed forest and the remainder colonising forest[1]. Major activities are logging for timber, hunting and collection of non-timber products.

Kibale Forest National Park covers 560 km^2 along an altitudinal range of 1,110–1,590 m and is one of the best-known forests in Uganda. The vegetation is classified as mid-altitude, moist evergreen forest. *Parinary* spp. are the dominant canopy trees. Logging for timber occurred in the early 1950s–1980s. Some illegal logging still occurs but at reduced levels. The area was declared a National Park in 1993. Areas surveyed included: undisturbed mature, mixed primary forest in the northern part of the park, around the biological field station popularly known as K30 red and K30 blue, Kanyancu (a tourist centre) and Ngogo (a research site); and a fourth site, consisting of secondary forest, which was logged over 30 years ago (K15).

Mabira Forest Reserve covers 320 km^2 and is 58 km west of Kampala by the road to Jinja. Some parts of this reserve were harvested in the early 1900s. Prior to 1988, intensive coffee/banana agriculture encroachment claimed large chunks of Mabira. Currently, 21% and 26% of the reserve have been designated as strict Nature Reserve and Buffer Zone.

Methods

Bird surveys were performed in accordance with previous work[2] and were conducted by playing the recorded calls of Nahan's Francolin, using tapes previously made in Budongo by I Owiunji and A Plumptre and soliciting responses through counter-calling and/or calling them out. In the study areas, existing trails served as transect lines. Along each trail system,calling stations were established at 200 m intervals and calls played for 2–3 mins. Replays were made at least five times at each station while adjusting the volume alternately from high to low and vice versa. Five minutes were spent at each site waiting for counter-calling. If a response was elicited, we tried to attract the birds by playing the tape continuously for 2–5 mins to bring them into view. Individuals within each group attracted to playbacks were counted whenever possible and their location was recorded. Different forest types subject to varying levels of disturbance were surveyed in each forest study area.

In addition, we interviewed 30 different households or individuals living in the village enclaves in Mabira Forest and its edges to discover whether they were familiar with or hunted the species.

Figure 1. Map of the study areas

Results

Distribution at different forest sites

Nahan's Francolin occurred principally in mixed forest subject to moderate logging and/or disturbance, or where natural gaps occurred (Table 1 and Fig 2). Extreme situations or conditions appear to be unfavourable for the species and it was not recorded at forest edge and plantation sites. Although significant effort was made in playback studies in the different forest types with a different management history in Kibale we were unable to elicit any responses there.

In Bugoma, more responses were recorded in the previously logged and actively logged sites. Unlike the other two forests, Mabira is a mosaic of disturbed and undisturbed forests interspersed by village enclaves. Most positive responses came from encroached sites (Table 2). Swamp forests were limited in range but those sites visited held the species.

Responses from local communities

Results (see Fig 3) demonstrate that most people know Nahan's Francolin and it is valuable for nutritional purposes. Many people reported that the bird provides good eating, it being described as more delicious than local domestic chicken. The eggs are collected and eaten, or used in traditional practices (eg witchcraft evoking evil spirits). The species is also seen as a bad omen: some people reported that if the species was seen in the village compound it presaged

Table 1. Summary of the number of calling stations at each site, positive responses and group sizes during phase 1 surveys.

Forest	Site	No. of Calling stations	No. of Positive response	No. in group
Bugoma	Nkwaki mixed forest (logged: previously and actively)	54	10	2,2,2
	Mwera (mature forest, near field station)	34	6	3
	Kyangwali (proposed nature reserve)	60	5	-
Total		148	21	
Mabira				
(phase 1)	Ndagala	56	9	1,3,
	Mbugwe	4	0	
	Nsaga	20	1	
	Namusa	56	5	2,2
	Site a	30	0	
	Site b	81	10	6
	Picnic site	5	0	
	Site c	7	0	
	Wanede	12	3	
	Ssese	10	0	
	Buwola	12	1	
	Namaganda	30	6	2
Total		323	35	
Kibale	K30-1	46	0	
	Census Road	42	0	
	K30-red	8	0	
	K30-blue	29	0	
	K30-2-3-4-5	85	0	
	Ngogo trail	21	0	
	Ngogo site	46	0	
	Kanyacu	37	0	
Total		314	0	

bad luck, indicating that someone within the family would die soon; three pointed out graves of people who had died soon after a Nahan's Francolin had crossed their compound.

The results indicated that different people had different names for the species: Kakojo, Ekofu and Nonasubi. All 17 respondents who described the bird correctly reported that it prefers riverine or swampy areas in tropical rainforest, and the majority indicated that the species does not leave the forest interior, unlike guineafowl *Numida* spp, which enter agricultural fields.

Miscellaneous

This survey covered three forest areas. Calls (either voluntary or in response to playback) were recorded only in Bugoma and Mabira forests. More positive responses were recorded in Bugoma, relative to the number of calling stations used. This may be due to the fact that Mabira forest is highly degraded. Ninety-nine percent of all positive responses came from mature forests, either in valley bottoms, swamp forests, or forest gaps with dense undergrowth. The species does not inhabit cultivated areas at forest edges, which are common around Mabira forest. Indi-

Table 2. Sites in Mabira visited during phase 2 and the maximum number of groups responding to playback.

Site	No. of visits	Est. distance covered	Max. no. of groups/visit	Habitat type
Namaganda	7	8 km	4	Mature primary forest
Namusa	6	7 km	6	Mature primary forest
Ndagala	6	6 km	7	Encroached forest
Buvunya	4	4 km	1	Forest-edge
Buwola	3	4 km	3	Encroached forest
Nsaga	4	4 km	2	Encroached forest
Trail a	5	7 km	2	Mature primary forest

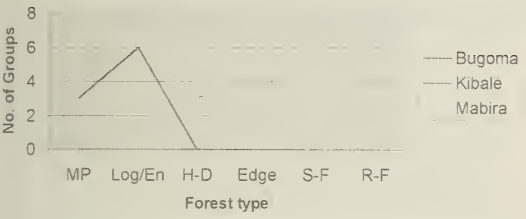

Figure 2. The maximum number of groups recorded in each forest type in each forest reserve.

Figure 3. The relative values of Nahan's Francolin to local people in Mabira forest. A=all respondents; B=those giving a description of the species. Total=17.

vidual group size is relatively small, being 1–5 birds. Pairs were commonly encountered, but it is unclear if the species is monogamous.

The species is able to tolerate moderate disturbance, but intense degradation leads to its disappearance. Similarly, swamps with dryer banks are favoured over very swampy areas. Nahan's Francolin could be used as a key indicator species in tropical forest ecosystem management and monitoring.

From our main study in Budongo we expect to discover more of the ecology of Nahan's Francolin but preliminary results indicate that it is relatively wide ranging (over 13 ha, ES pers obs) and is reported to feed on a variety of foods including bulbs, insects, invertebrates, seeds of *Trema orientalis* and *Measopsis eminii* (A Cawley pers comm). All of our breeding records have come from unlogged primary forest, in large trees with huge buttress roots and cavities resulting from natural ageing. These issues may have wider conservation implications for the species.

Conservation implications

Nahan's Francolin faces a substantial level of threat. As forest fragments are highly threatened ecosystems throughout tropical Africa (through logging, human encroachment and fragmentation) there is a need for long-term conservation action. In addition to habitat threats, the species appears to be hunted throughout its range. This threat appears to be substantial and requires further investigation. Spatial and temporal levels of hunting activity require assessment. This survey revealed that they are hunted and used for a variety of purposes—decoration, because of their purportedly beautiful feathers (A. Cawley pers comm), and food etc.

Future activities

More information concerning the species' ecology is being collected in Budongo forest. Blood samples are being collected for future analysis, in order to better understand the natural history and taxonomy of this little-known bird. Additional fieldwork in Kibale and Semuliki forests is required to substantiate earlier findings.

Acknowledgements

The Forestry Department, Kampala granted permission for this project. Funding was obtained through the generous support of the Chicago Zoological Society at Chicago via the Partridge Quail and Francolin (PQF) Specialist Group of IUCN and the African Bird Club Conservation Fund. All the guides in the different forests were very helpful.

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Supported by ABC *Conservation Fund*

Two new resident birds in northern Zambia

Peter Leonard[a] and Carl Beel[b]

Les auteurs ont récemment identifié deux espèces résidentes nouvelles pour la Zambie du nord: le Tisserin de Reichard *Ploceus reichardi* et la Bouscarle à ailes blanches *Bradypterus carpalis*. Le tisserin, qui fut découvert en janvier 1996, se trouve être commun le long de la Saisi, près de la frontière avec la Tanzanie, et ne semble pas menacé. L'espèce est considérée comme ayant une aire de répartition restreinte par BirdLife International; ainsi, la zone a-t-elle été proposée comme Zone d'Importance pour la Conservation des Oiseaux (ZICO). En décembre 1996, la bouscarle fut découverte dans un marais de papyrus le long de la Luapula, près de Chabilikila. Cette zone a également été proposée comme ZICO. Avant cette observation, les sites les plus proches d'où l'espéce était connue se situaient dans le nord-ouest de la Tanzanie.

During three New Year trips in 1996–1998, we undertook fieldwork for the Zambia Bird Atlas Project[3] in several wetlands on the country's northern border. Among our findings were two resident species previously unrecorded in Zambia: Lake Tanganyika Weaver *Ploceus reichardi* and White-winged Swamp-Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*.

Lake Tanganyika Weaver *Ploceus reichardi*

On 8–10 January 1996, we found Lake Tanganyika Weaver to be common along the Saisi River at the point where it enters Tanzania (08°58'S 31°40'E)[4,7]. Its occurrence here is unsurprising given that the species was known to be present in nearby Tanzania. The Saisi River and its immediate tributaries constitute the only cross-border river system, draining into the Rukwa basin to which this species appears to be largely restricted. It therefore appears unlikely that the species will be found elsewhere in Zambia.

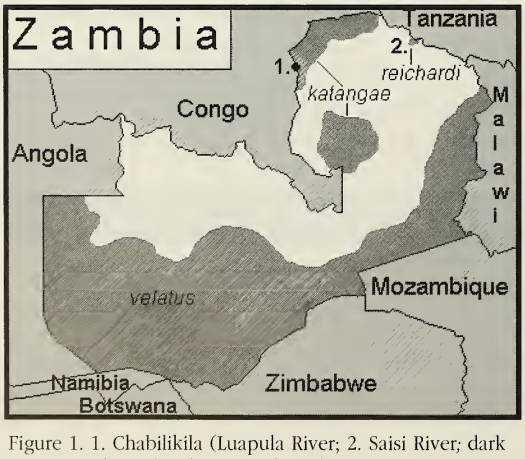

Figure 1. 1. Chabilikila (Luapula River; 2. Saisi River; dark grey—Zambian distributions of masked weavers; pale grey hatch—Zambian distribution of Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris* and White-winged Swamp-Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*

Lake Tanganyika Weaver is the third member of the masked weaver complex to be recorded in Zambia: *P. velatus* occurs in much of the south and east of the country and *P. katangae* in the Luapula drainage. The taxonomy of these forms is a matter of some debate; *P. reichardi* and *P. katangae* are swamp dwellers whereas *P. velatus* is not. They are allopatric (see Fig 1) and, although Dowsett & Forbes-Watson[5] considered *P. reichardi* as conspecific with *P. ruweti* under the English name Lake Lufira Weaver, this treatment obscures the situation and Lake Tanganyika Weaver appears a more appropriate name (R. J. Dowsett pers comm).

Lake Tanganyika Weaver is considered a restricted-range species by BirdLife International[6] and the site has been proposed as an Important Bird Area (IBA)[9]. In this area, the species appears unthreatened.

White-winged Swamp-Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*

On 30 December 1996, during fieldwork in papyrus swamp in the Luapula River near Chabilikila (09°32'S 28°42'E), we heard what appeared to be unusual Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* songs. However the birds, when seen, proved to be White-winged Swamp-Warblers[4,8], a species previously known from no nearer than north-west Tanzania.

The vocal similarities between White-winged Swamp-Warbler and Little Rush Warbler, which was also present, are remarkable. Both songs consist of an accelerating sequence of short *ch-rip* notes, often completed during an aerial wing-whirring display. In *carpalis*, the overall phrase lasts little more than 5 s, considerably shorter than that of *baboecala* which lasts 10–15 s or longer. The voice of *carpalis* is more metallic in timbre, with the notes being delivered faster and apparently at a higher pitch. Once, a bird was attracted by playing the song of *baboecala*

speeded up by 20%. The wing-whirring is not consistently performed, and may be present in several short bursts or as a single longer sequence. In *baboecala* this display tends to be in 1–3 longer bursts. Many *carpalis* exhibit either an obvious drop in register or a general fall in pitch over the whole phrase whereas the song of *baboecala* remains at a constant pitch, but this is also an inconsistent feature. In other areas where the two species are sympatric, the voice of *baboecala* is very high-pitched unlike that of *carpalis*, which is on a much lower pitch (D. Turner pers. comm.). In Zambia, it is apparently *carpalis* that has altered its song with *baboecala* retaining its normal song.

The density of *carpalis* was estimated to be c2 pairs per ha in suitable habitat and the ratio of *carpalis* to *baboecala* was estimated as 3:1. White-winged Swamp-Warbler has subsequently been found in additional areas south to 10°02'S.

Interestingly, the species' global distribution resembles that of Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris*, and in common with that species, the Zambian population of White-winged Warbler may represent a separate subspecies. Papyrus Yellow Warbler is classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife International[2] and consequently the papyrus swamp at the mouth of the Luapula has been proposed as an IBA. At present the only threat to the habitat is fire, but the nature and extent of this problem has yet to be investigated. It is worth noting that the Zambian subspecies of Papyrus Yellow Warbler *C. g. bensoni* is highly distinctive due to its white iris—a feature omitted from both the text and illustrations in Urban *et al*[10]. ?

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Plates on page 58:

1 Adult male Lake Tanganyika Weaver *Ploceus reichardi*, Saisi River, 10 January 1996 (P. M. Leonard)

2 Adult male Katanga Masked Weaver *Ploceus katangae*, 1 January 1998 (P. M. Leonard)

3 Adult male African Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus*, Kafue, 24 November 1997 (P. M. Leonard)

4 Adult male Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris*, Chabilikila, 2 January 1998 (P. M. Leonard)

5 Adult White-winged Swamp-Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*, Chabilikila, 2 January 1998 (P. M. Leonard)

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Short Notes

Le Pique-boeufs à bec jaune *Buphagus africanus* buveur occasionnel de lait de vache

Babacar Ndao

In Senegal, Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus* was regularly observed drinking fresh milk from receptacles left unattended by herdsmen. This behaviour does not appear to have been documented previously.

L'article de Breitwisch[1] m'incite à vous commiquer une observation que j'ai maintes fois faite sur le comportement du Pique-boeufs à bec jaune *Buphagus africanus*, et qui ne semble pas encore avoir été signalée.

Il s'agit de l'habitude qu'a ce sturnidé de boire du lait de vache dans les écuelles ou les pots métalliques utilisés comme tels. Entre deux traites, le berger dépose à terre le récipient, sans pendre la précaution de le fermer, puis s'en éloigne pour préparer une autre vache à l'opération. Alors, l'oiseau, qui le surveillait, fixé sur une bête ou perché sur un arbre voisin, s'y dirige rapidement et, s'agrippant fortement sur le rebord, opère une spectaculaire inclinaison du corps tout entier vers le fond afin d'amener le bec à la surface du lait et de s'abreuver à petits coups. Le retour du vacher le fait s'envoler mais, dès que l'homme repart, il retourne à son repas. Ce manège peut durer tout le temps nécessaire à la collecte du lait du troupeau, et le pique-boeufs peut s'y prendre aussi bien en solitaire qu'à plusieurs. Il semble tellement prendre goût à cette nourriture que même les éclaboussures de lait contre les parois du récipient sont, à l'occasion, exploitées.

Au Sénégal, ce comportement est bien connu des pasteurs. Il n'est pas vraisemblablement lié à la soif, puisqu'il se remarque même par les matins le plus froids, pas davantage qu'il ne paraît dû à la rareté des tiques, présentes en quantité suffisante sur le bétail.

Il serait intéressant de savoir si le Pique-boeufs à bec rouge *B. erythrorhynchus*, se comporte pareillement.

La consommation de lait (ou crême) de vache a été observée chez 15 espèces de passereaux européens, surtout chez les Mésanges *Parus* spp., oiseaux particulièrement inventifs et habiles, qui ont vite appris à ouvrir les capsules molles des bouteilles de lait pour boire la crême du dessus[2–6]. Parmi les consommateurs occasionnels figure l'Etourneau sansonnet *Sturnus vulgaris*.

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c/o Mame Marie Diouf, Niary-Tally, Taba-Ngoye, Kaolack, Sénégal.

Observations de Gonoleks de Barbarie *Laniarius barbarus* à dessous jaune Sénégal

Babacar Ndao

A Yellow-crowned Gonolek with entirely yellow underparts was discovered at Keur Gadj, Senegal, on 19 July 1989[1]. It was paired with a normal individual and was regularly observed during the following seven years. Duetting appeared to be initiated by either bird. On 28 July 1990, the pair was accompanied by an apparently young bird, which also had yellow underparts. The aberrant adult remained in the area after the killing of its partner, in July 1993, and, while remaining unpaired, was regularly heard singing. It was last seen in September 1996.

Un Gonolek de Barbarie *Laniarius barbarus* à dessous entièrement jaune (sauf les sous-caudales) fut découvert à Keur Gadj, Sénégal, en juillet 1986[1]. Il était accouplé à un individu normal et le couple a été observé régulièrement pendant 7 ans. Le chant en duo était initié par l'un ou l'autre des adultes. Le 28 juillet 1990, le couple était accompagné d'un jeune au dessous également jaune. L'adulte aux colorations aberrantes a continué de fréquenter le site après la disparition de son partenaire, tué au lance-pierres en juillet 1993. Bien que chantant régulièrement, il est apparemment resté célibataire; il a été vu pour la dernière fois en septembre 1996.

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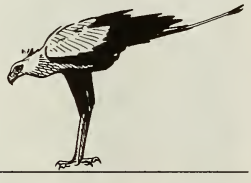
c/o Mame Marie Diouf, Niary-Tally, Taba-Ngoye, Kaolack, Sénégal.

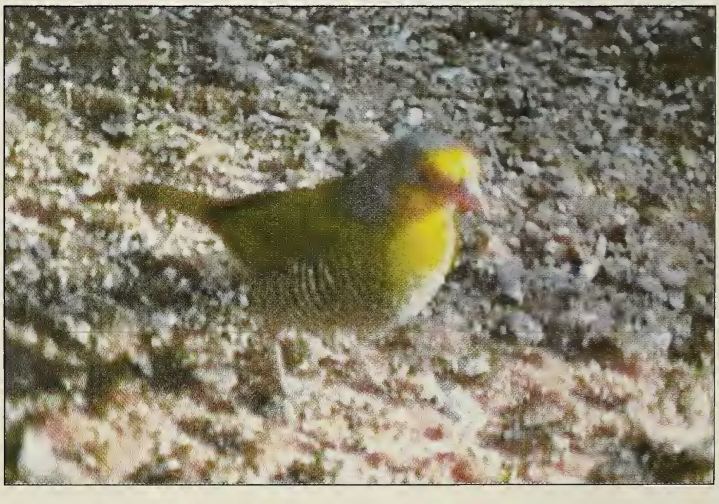
Letters



Unidentified pytilias

The description given by Welch & Welch of the presently unidentified pytilias which appeared in *Bull. ABC* 5: 46–50 differ little from birds first observed in 1986 by Kenny Hand of Kathu in the northern Cape province, South Africa. The yellow-throated pytilia breeds alongside Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba*, but does not occur in mixed family groups, preferring to feed and drink separately. They are found within a radius of 8 km, in Camelthorn, which grows along the banks of a winding dry riverbed. The photograph shows a captive male.

Neville Brickell, Avicultural Research Unit (Southern African Region), 100 Innes Road, Durban 4001, South Africa.



Une nouvelle espèce de petit-duc (*Otus*, Aves) aux Comores: taxonomie et statut de conservation

René Marie Lafontaine and Nathalie Moulaert

A new population of *Otus*, allied to those species on nearby islands in the Indian Ocean, was discovered during studies in forest habitats on the island of Mohéli (Comoros). The most important differences between the species are presented in tabular form. Voice is the single most important difference between the four Comorian *Otus* populations. The uniqness of the taxon is supported by a number of phenotypical characteristics, the most obvious being the general coloration (rufous-brown) and the existence of a rufous phase (Plate 4). The species is found in dense humid forest on Mohéli, which is restricted to 3,000 ha (or 5% of the island's area), where it occurs at a density of c1 bird/5ha in near-primary forest (1,000 ha) and 1 bird/10ha in more degraded stands (2,000 ha). The total population is estimated at c400 individuals.

Situé dans le canal du Mozambique, entre Madagascar et l'Afrique, l'archipel des Comores est formé de quatre îles, Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mohéli et Mayotte. Son avifaune est d'affinité malgache, et quelque cinquante huit taxons d'oiseaux sont endémiques à l'archipel. Parmi ceux-ci, trois petits-ducs du genre Otus étaient connus. Ces trois taxons ont tous été considérés à un moment ou à un autre comme des sous-espèces d'*Otus rutilus*. Des études récentes sur les caractéristiques morphologiques et la voix de ces oiseaux ont conduit à reconnaître le caractère spécifique de deux d'entre eux, *Otus pauliani* de Grande Comore[4] et *Otus capnodes* d'Anjouan[12]. Seule la population de Mayotte est donc encore actuellement considérée comme une sous-espèce de *Otus rutilus*, sous le nom d'*Otus rutilus mayottensis*. Aucun petit-duc n'était connu de Mohéli[6,7] bien que Benson[2] ait évoqué la possibilité d'une présence.

Découverte de l'oiseau

En février 1995, un petit hibou est observé au chalet Saint-Antoine (Mohéli, alt. 700 m) par le second auteur et M. de Lopé. Suite à cette observation, J.-P. Ledant (com. pers.) nous a signalé avoir entendu des cris nocturnes peut-être attribuables à un petit-duc.

En septembre 1996, des comptages par points d'écoute ont été effectués dans la forêt de Mohéli. Ils avaient pour but principal de comparer les peuplements ornithologiques de différents types de formations forestières[11]. Dès le coucher du soleil, outre les cris du puffin *Puffinus* (*lherminieri*) temptator et du perroquet *Coracopsis vasa*, un chant inconnu se faisait entendre. L'auteur de ce chant était relativement commun puisqu'une dizaine d'exemplaires furent entendus durant la nuit du 15 septembre depuis le chalet Saint-Antoine.

Nous avons alors placé des filets japonais et capturé le petit rapace nocturne du genre *Otus* susceptible d'être l'auteur du chant nocturne inconnu.

Nous avons poursuivi les prospections dans la forêt du Mlédjélé, à cinq kilomètres du site de la première capture. Nous avons entendu un chant identique à celui du chalet Saint-Antoine, la nuit ou au crépuscule (8 à 9 individus), le 22 septembre et les 21 et 22 octobre. La confirmation ultime que l'*Otus* était bien l'auteur de ces chants vint lorsque deux individus, maintenus quelques jours en captivité, se mirent à chanter. Le chant était en tout point similaire à celui entendu précédemment.

Description

Des comparaisons quant aux caractères morphologiques ont été réalisées entre les spécimens collectés et des spécimens d'autres *Otus* de la région malgache présents dans les collections du British Museum (Natural History), Tring, du Zoological Museum, University of Cambridge, et du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris). Des enregistrements de la voix de ces espèces ont également été comparés entre eux. A la suite de ces examens, il est apparu évident que les spécimens de Mohéli formaient un nouveau taxon bien différencié. Les trois spécimens, deux mâles et une femelle, possèdent une combinaison de caractères morphologiques, en particulier de plumage, et des paramètres vocaux bien distincts de ceux de toute autre espèce déjà décrite. Ces caractères nous ont convaincus que ce nouveau petit-duc mérite d'être reconnu comme une nouvelle espèce pour laquelle nous proposons le nom de

Otus moheliensis sp. nov.

Petit-duc de Mohéli

Types

Holotype. - Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique, n°3190, série type; femelle adulte collectée à Mohéli (Comores) dans la forêt du Mlédjélé, 12°19'03"S et 43°43'50"E, à 620 m d'altitude, le 21 octobre 1996 par N. Moulaert et I. Saïd; préparé par P.-Y. Renkin; n° de récolte 1996 - O - 4.

Paratypes. - Deux autres spécimens de *Otus moheliensis* ont également été déposés à l'Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique. (1) IRSNB n°3191, série type; mâle adulte, capturé dans la forêt du Mlédjélé (Mohéli), 12°19'03"S et 43°43'50"E, à 620 m d'altitude (même site que l'holotype), le 22 octobre 1996; collecté par N. Moulaert et I. Saïd; préparé par P.-Y. Renkin; n° de récolte 1996 - O - 3. (2) IRSNB n°3189, série type; mâle adulte, capturé au chalet Saint-Antoine (Mohéli), 12°16'57"S et 46°39'49"E, à 690 m d'altitude, le 19 septembre 1996; collecté par R.-M. Lafontaine et I. Saïd, préparé par P.-Y. Renkin; n° de récolte 1996 - O - 1.

Diagnose

Un *Otus* brun roux, de taille moyenne, avec un disque facial peu marqué et des aigrettes relictuelles. Se différencie des *Otus* africains et malgaches (sauf *O. pauliani* et *O. capnodes*) par les tarses déplumés sur un tiers de la longueur totale, par la réduction des aigrettes et par l'atténuation extrême des dessins sur les scapulaires. Se différencie de *O. pauliani* par sa taille supérieure, un bec plus robuste et un plumage plus sombre. Se différencie de *O. capnodes* par son plumage plus roux et vif. Se différencie de *O. pauliani* et *O. capnodes* par son chant totalement distinct.

Distribution

Dans la forêt dense humide de Mohéli (Comores), entre 450 m et 790 m d'altitude.

Description de l'holotype

Plumage: Le dos est composé de plumes très homogènes quant à leur coloration. De couleur brun antique (Antique Brown 37, selon Smithe[13]), une plume typique du dos est irrégulièrement barrée et marbrée de noir. Les barres sont sombres, au nombre de 2 ou 3, et d'une largeur de 2 mm. Les plumes de la base de la nuque sont davantage marbrées de noir et forment un collier plus sombre. Les aigrettes sont courtes; leurs plumes présentent une coloration et des dessins similaires à ceux des plumes dorsales. Chaque scapulaire a un vexille externe de couleur cannelle (Cinnamon 39), finement barré de 1 ou 2 traits noirs, terminé par une zone sombre à son extrémité. Les tertiaires et la plupart des couvertures sont de couleur brun uniforme au centre (Vandyke brown, 121); ils présentent des liserés marbrés de brun antique. Les vexilles externes des primaires et secondaires sont régulièrement barrés de taches chamois (Buff, 124) dans leur partie proximale et marbrées de brun antique dans leur partie distale. Les vexilles internes sont brun uniforme (Vandyke brown, 121). Les plumes de la queue, non barrées, sont uniformément marbrées de brun antique sur un fond brun Vandyke. Les soies de la face sont très développées; leur base est très claire à blanchâtre, leur extrémité est noire. Le disque facial est peu marqué, limité par une étroite bordure noire. Les plumes de la gorge sont blanchâtres et chamois sur leur extrémité. La poitrine et l'abdomen sont roux-cannelle (True Cinnamon, 139 et Kingfisher Rufous, 240), striés de noir. Chaque plume présente une strie brune (Vandyke brown, 121), large de 1 mm, sur le rachis. Cette strie s'élargit irrégulièrement, perpendiculairement au rachis. La partie inférieure de l'abdomen est finement barrée de chamois (Chamois, 123D) sur un fond roux-cannelle. Les cuisses et la partie emplumée des tarses sont écaillées de brun Vandyke et de brun antique. Les couleurs des parties molles (individu vivant): iris jaune-vert; partie supérieure des pattes gris anthracite, plante des pattes de couleur chair-jaunâtre; bec sombre.

Mensurations: Longueur de l'aile (corde), 161 mm; queue, 71 mm; tarse, 34 mm; bec (culmen de la base du bec à la pointe), 23 mm; poids de l'exemplaire frais, 116 g.

Variation chez les paratypes

Le premier paratype est très similaire à l'holotype par tous ses caractères de plumage.

Le deuxième paratype est un individu de phase rousse[8]. En raison de la saturation de couleur de cette phase, la plupart des détails de plumage sont atténués par rapport à l'holotype et au premier paratype. La face inférieure de l'individu n°3189 présente une couleur rousse; les stries sont moins nombreuses et plus fines. Les barres de la partie inférieure de l'abdomen sont moins distinctes. La face dorsale de l'individu est nettement rousse et moins striée-marbrée. La queue est indistinctement barrée. Les mensurations des deux paratypes sont reprises dans la tableau 1 et comparées à celles de divers taxons de la région malgache.

Etymologie

Nous nommons cette espèce d'après sa distribution, limitée à l'île de Mohéli.

Relations systématiques

Les petits-ducs du genre *Otus* ont un plumage très variable et mimétique avec l'écorce ou les feuilles mortes. Le rôle de celui-ci est de camoufler l'individu lorsqu'il dort pendant la journée[9]. Cette coloration

varie géographiquement et en fonction de la végétation. Les caractères de plumages chez les rapaces nocturnes sont donc une adaptation au milieu et n'ont pas l'importance taxonomique qu'ils présentent pour de nombreuses autres familles d'oiseaux. Les vocalisations de ces oiseaux nocturnes fournissent par contre une information taxonomique beaucoup plus pertinente[9]. D'autres caractères morphologiques (tarses plus ou moins emplumés, aigrettes plus ou moins développées ...) présentent également une information utile.

Le petit-duc de Mohéli fait partie du groupe manadensis de Marshall[9] qui regroupe la plupart des petits-ducs occupant les îles pélagiques de l'océan indien. Ce groupe englobe entre autres *Otus magicus* y compris *O. (magicus) insularis* des îles Seychelles, *O. mantananensis*, *O. elegans*, *O. umbra*, *O. hartlaubi* de Sao Tomé et le complexe d'*Otus rutilus*. Ce complexe d'*O. rutilus* est uni en une espèce par Marshall[9], subdivisée en cinq sous-espèces, *O. r. rutilus* de Madagascar, *O. r. mayottensis* de Mayotte, *O. r. capnodes* d'Anjouan, *O. r. pauliani* de Grande Comore et *O. r. pembae* de Pemba. *O. mobeliensis* y appartient de toute évidence. Depuis l'étude de Marshall, les relations à l'intérieur du complexe ont été réévaluées et l'importance des divergences reconnue. Trois taxons ont été élevés au rang spécifique, *O. capnodes*[12], *O. pauliani*[4] et *O. pembae*[3].

Le tableau 2 reprend les principales caractéristiques des *Otus* du groupe manadensis à l'intérieur de la région malgache. La combinaison des tarses partiellement déplumés, des dessins sur les scapulaires et des aigrettes vestigiales rapprochent *O. mobeliensis* d'*O. capnodes* et d'*O. pauliani*, comme d'ailleurs le dessin d'ensemble du plumage, avec une face ventrale finement barrée, dans laquelle une admixture importante de barres claires assez larges est caractéristique. Cet ensemble de caractères distinguent nettement ces trois taxons des autres formes de la région.

A l'intérieur de l'ensemble *O. capnodes*, *O. pauliani*, *O. mobeliensis*, ce dernier se distingue morphologiquement par la possesion d'un morphe roux, par la couleur plus brun-roux du morphe "normal", par la couleur chamois et non blanche des barres de la face inférieure. Les chants territoriaux des trois formes comoriennes sont remarquablement distinctifs. Aucun n'approche le *hou-hou-hou* doux et

Tableau 1. Mensurations des *Otus* du groupe manadensis à l'intérieur de la région malgache, les données quantitatives, minimum-maximum (moyenne; nombre d'individus mesurés), proviennent de nos propres mesures à l'exception du poids et des mensurations du mâle d'*Otus insularis*.

Taxon	Sexe	Aile[1]	Culmen[2]	Tarse[3]	Tarse exposé[4]	Poids[5]
O. moheliensis	M	155–164	23–24	35–36	1/3	95
		(159.5;2)	(23.5;2)	(35.5;2)		
	F	161	23	34	1/3–1/4	116
O. capnodes	o	153–165.5	20–24.5	35.5–39	1/3	-
		(160.6;14)	(22.7;14)	(37.6;14)		
O. pauliani	M	138	21	27	1/3	-
O. r. mayottensis	M	166–169	(22)25.5–26	34–40	<1/6	-
		(167.5;4)	(25.8;3)	(36.9;4)		
	F	167–178	26–27	34.5–38	>1/7	
		(172;4)	(26.4;4)	(36.5;4)		
O. r. rutilus	M	20–24		29.5–32		
		(21.7;8)		(30.7;8)	0/1	85,97,105,107
	F	20–23		26–32	0/1	112
		(21.3;8)		(29.5;8)		
	o	21.5–23.5		27–31.5	0/1	116
		(22.2;8)		(29.5;8)		
O. pembaensis	M	146–152.5	22–23.5	29–31	0/1	-
		(149.3;5)	(22.6;5)	(29.8;5)		
	F	145–147	22–22.5	28–29	0/1	-
		(146.0;2)	(22.3;2)	(28.5;2)		
O. insularis[6]	M	163	25		1/1	-
	F	168	28	34.5	9/10	-

[1] longeur de l'aile en mm (corde).
[2] longeur du bec de la base du bec à la pointe en mm.
[3] longeur du tarse en mm.
[4] proportion du tarse nu.
[5] en gramme, mesuré sur les individus frais pour *O. moheliensis*, d'après les étiquettes de collecte pour les autres spécimens.
[6] d'après Safford[12]

Tableau 2. Caractéristiques des espèces d'*Otus* du groupe manadensis à l'intérieur de la région malgache.

Taxon	Tarse exposé	Vocalisations principales	dessin sur les scapulaires	Aigrette
O. moheliensis	1/3–1/4	1. chuintement aspiré en séquence de 1 à 5 2. grincement (screech)	rélictuel	vestigiale
O. capnodes	1/3	1. *piiuu* sifflé en séquence de 3 à 5 2. grincement (screech)	rélictuel	absente
O. pauliani	1/3	*cho* répété en longue série	rélictuel	vestigiale
O. r. mayottensis	<1/6 M; >1/7 F	*hou-ou* répété 3 à 5 fois	visible	proéminente
O. r. rutilus	0/1	*hou-ou* répété 3 à 5 fois	visible	proéminente
O. pembaensis	0/1	*hou* répété en longue séquence	très visible	petite
O. insularis	9/10–1/1	croassement rauque répété en longue séquence	très visible	petite

mélodieux d'*O. rutilus*. Le chuintement habituellement utilisé par *O. moheliensis* est très différent du *cho* répété d'*O. pauliani* et du sifflement aigu et mélodieux d'*O. capnodes*. Il est intéressant de noter que comme *O. capnodes*, *O. moheliensis* possède un deuxième type de vocalisation, qui paraît être un cri d'excitation. Ce cri paraît assez semblable chez les deux espèces, ressemble dans une certaine mesure au chant territorial d'*O. moheliensis* et au-delà à celui d'*O. insularis* et d'espèces asiatiques du groupe d'*O. magicus*.

Habitat et distribution

L'île de Mohéli est située à mi-distance entre la côte mozambicaine et la côte nord-ouest de Madagascar. Elle est d'origine volcanique et constituée de deux entités géomorphologiques distinctes, un plateau et une crête centrale aux versants abrupts (altitude maximale: 790 m). Sa superficie est de 211 km^2. Le petit-duc est présent uniquement dans la forêt dense humide qui couvre la crête et la partie supérieure des versants. Cette forêt se caractérise par une importante richesse en épiphylles et épiphytes (lichens, fougères, orchidées et dicotylédones) et un endémisme remarquable.

Statut de conservation de *Otus moheliensis*

Otus moheliensis doit être considéré d'ores et déjà comme une espèce en danger. En effet, la forêt dense humide de Mohéli, son habitat, est menacée et se dégrade rapidement. Elle s'étend entre 790 m d'altitude (sommet de l'île) et 400 à 600 m (limite inférieur d'origine anthropique). En 1995, la forêt dense humide, intacte de toute culture, occupait 1,070 ha, soit 5 % de la superficie de l'île[10] alors qu'entre 1955 et 1968, sa superficie était estimée entre 5,000 et 6,000 ha, soit près de 30% de la superficie de l'île[1,5]. Cette réduction de surface résulte de l'occupation de la forêt par les agriculteurs: ils s'approprient des parcelles en forêt, les défrichent et y installent des cultures vivrières.

Otus moheliensis est une espèce relativement abondante dans son habitat. Nous avons en effet estimé sa densité à 1 individu/5 ha en forêt intacte et 1 individu/10 ha en forêt dégradée. Le nombre total d'individus est de l'ordre de 400.

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Personality: Roger Fotso

Rowena Quantrill

This is the first in an occasional series of articles introducing African ornithologists, conservationists and researchers. Contributions and suggestions for future 'personalities' are welcome and should be sent to the editorial address on the inside back cover of the Bulletin.

When Roger Fotso was young his parents' ambition was to see him become a doctor. They may have been surprised when Roger fulfilled their ambition not as a medical doctor but with a PhD in ornithology. Yet it was Roger's father, a school-teacher and artist, who first inspired his son's interest in the natural world which he taught him to observe and respect.

Roger and Jeanette Fotso (Rowena Quantrill)

Roger Corneille Fotso was born in Baham, near Bafoussam in the West Province of Cameroon. He attended local primary and secondary schools, specialising in biology and maths at the latter. He was always interested in birds in a general way but it was when he continued to the University of Yaoundé to study biology and animal physiology that his interest was strengthened, encouraged by his practical classes and the enthusiasm of one of his lecturers, Jean-Paul Ducoux, who became his "bird mentor".

As part of his first degree Roger made a study of the birds on the Yaoundé University campus, an unexpected highlight of which was when an African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* wandered into his laboratory! Continuing with his studies, Roger gained his maîtrise in zoology in 1986 and his Diplômes d'Etudes Approfondies in 1987.

From 1987 Roger lectured part-time at the university but at the same time began to deepen his knowledge and understanding of birds by camping alone for weeks at a time in the Kala and Eloumden forests. It was here that he came across that strange bird, the Grey-necked Picathartes *Picathartes oreas*. Fascinated by the bizarre lifestyle of a bird which bounds across the forest floor in ungainly hops yet builds mud nests on the walls of shallow caves and overhangs, Roger spent hours watching it and noting its behaviour, gaining a depth of knowledge which has made him one of the world's leading experts on the bird.

Between 1990 and 1991 Roger experienced a very different forest environment when he became the ecologist on the BirdLife International project for the conservation of the montane forest ecosystem of Mt. Kilum in the North-West Province of Cameroon. Here he spent 11 months studying Bannerman's Turaco *Tauraco bannermani* and Banded Wattle-eye *Platysteira latycincta*, and helping to train local birders. Anyone visiting the area will realise the debt they owe Roger when they are taken up the mountain by one of the local guides, such as Ernest, whose interest and love for the birds has been inspired by Roger.

By now Roger was ready to continue his academic studies and he spent the next four years working for his PhD at the Zoological Institute, Faculty of Science, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, with frequent trips home for research as the subject of his thesis was the *Dynamique des peuplements d'oiseaux dans les séries écologiques de la région de Yaoundé (Sud Cameroun)*.

In 1994 Roger gained his doctorate and returned to Cameroon to work as research co-ordinator and scientific adviser for the Cameroon element of the European Union's ECOFAC (Conservation and Sustainable Utilisation of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa) programme. His main area of research was the Dja Reserve where he discovered nesting colonies of *Picathartes* larger than any he had yet come across. In 1998 he took up his present job—Co-Director Cameroon Biodiversity Programme, initiated and implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society (founded in 1895 as the New York Zoological Society).

A long list of publications bear testimony to the value and weight of Roger's research but just as important is the part he has played in encouraging an interest in birds and in conservation among Cameroonians. To this end he helped found the Cameroon Ornithological Society (COC) in 1995 and is now its acting President. He is also the BirdLife International representative in Cameroon, and a member of both the Pan-African Ornithological Congress and CARPE (Central African Regional Programme for the Environment) advisory board.

In 1996 Roger married Jeanette Nguiedem, who now works with him and says she is learning fast about birds! Roger still finds time for his other interests—soccer (watching more than playing these days) and dancing. He is also a talented artist and superb photographer as his photographs of Bannerman's Turaco and Grey-necked Picathartes hanging on the wall of our house in England demonstrate.

Anyone who attended the symposium on indigenous knowledge (to which Roger was a contributor and co-convenor) at the International Ornithological Congress in Durban, will have heard testimony to the need to tap into the wealth of local knowledge of birds which exists. It is people like Roger who are best placed to use this knowledge and to take the lead, as he is doing, in the conservation of the natural resources of his country.

Reviews

Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands

Ian Sinclair and Olivier Langrand. Illustrated by Norman Arlott, Hilary Burn, Peter Hayman and Ian Lewington. 1998. 184 pp, 71 colour plates and many maps. Struik, Cape Town, South Africa. ISBN 1 86872 035 7. UK£17.95.

Birds of Madagascar. A Photographic Guide

Pete Morris and Frank Hawkins. 1998. 316 pp, numerous photographs, 2 maps. Pica Press, The Banks, Nr. Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY. ISBN 1 873403 45 3. UK£28.00.

It was a long wait before a comprehensive guide to the very distinctive Malagasy avifauna, illustrating all its species, was published, in 1990. Olivier Langrand's excellent *Guide to the Birds of Madagascar*[1] is, however, a rather bulky tome, especially considering the relatively low number of species—just under 260—that needed to be treated. It also has some decidedly user-unfriendly features which could have been easily avoided, but were nonetheless repeated in the French edition, which appeared five years after the original[1]. Thus, the plate captions consist solely of species names each preceded by a number indicating order of treatment in the text. Numerical order is, however, not followed in the captions and no identification pointers are given, despite there being plenty of room to do so. The number of the plate that illustrates the species is not indicated in the species accounts, making it sometimes hard to find the relevant illustration. The distribution maps are grouped at the end of the book and species are indicated by number only, not by name. The birds on the colour plates also generally appear a bit pallid.

Two new books on the birds of the region have now been published almost simultaneously. Both are considerably smaller in size and lighter in weight than the original Langrand and will, for this reason alone, appeal to the travelling birder.

Sinclair & Langrand's is by far the smaller and lighter of the two, although it covers not only the birds of Madagascar, but, conveniently, also those of the other islands of the region: Mauritius, Réunion, Rodrigues, the Seychelles and the Comoros. It is the first field guide to do so. This attractively produced book is presented in the well-established and handy format of colour plates facing succinct species accounts that are accompanied by small distribution maps. An introductory chapter, designed to serve as a general guide to locating the endemic species, presents the various islands and island groups in nine pages and includes a small map of each. In the following 141 pages, 359 regularly encountered species are described and illustrated. Several taxa, usually treated as subspecies, have been elevated to species rank. Although some of these will cause little surprise, eg Madagascar Hoopoe *Upupa marginata* (split from *U. epops*), many others are bound to cause some eyebrows to be raised, such as, to name but two, the splits of 'Comoro' Cuckoo-Roller *Leptosomus gracilis* from 'Madagascar' Cuckoo-Roller *L. discolor* and of 'Comoro' Blue Vanga *Cyanolanius comoriensis* from 'Madagascar' Blue Vanga *C. madagascarinus*. Surprisingly, it is the less distinct cuckoo-roller taxon from Grand Comoro which is given species status, while the more distinctive form from Anjouan, for which species status has sometimes been suggested[2], remains lumped with the nominate. Comoro Thrush *Turdus bewsheri*, for which a split has been proposed, remains a single species. In a move that is rather unusual these days, one taxon formerly treated as a species has been accorded subspecific status: Benson's Rock Thrush *Monticola* (=*Pseudocossyphus*) *bensoni* has been lumped with Forest Rock Thrush *M. sharpei*. Species that have been recorded fewer than ten times—89 in total—have not been treated, but merely listed at the end of the book.

The plates are generally of the high standard almost taken for granted nowadays, and, although having four illustrators inevitably has resulted in different styles, I did not find this distracting. Occasionally, the colours are too saturated, as on the kingfisher and bee-eater plate, but this is probably not the illustrator's fault but the printer's. A serious error in scale has been made on p. 127, where the tiny sunbird-asities *Neodrepanis* appear almost as big as the stocky asities *Philepitta*. There are, inevitably, a few other mistakes. The Sakalava Rail *Amaurornis olivieri*, on p. 75, confusingly resembles a small *Porzana* crake, rather than its closest relative on the African mainland, the relatively similar Black Crake *A. flavirostris*. Cryptic Warbler *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi* should have dark, not pale, legs, and the breast and belly of Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatanus* should be bright white, not grey. Comoro Thrush appears washed out whilst the fodies look too grey and have lost their conspicuous pale feather edgings. Inter-island variation is sometimes poorly treated: the Comoro Fody *Foudia eminentissima* described and illustrated is the Grand Comoro form; in the races occurring on the other islands of the archipelago the red in the plumage is more extensive, making them appear very similar to Forest Fody *F. omissa*. Similarly, the very distinct form of Comoro Thrush on Anjouan is not illustrated nor discussed in the text.

In some illustrations, the characteristic jizz of a species has been missed, as in the mesites and the flufftails, perhaps because of the illustrator's lack of field experience, but this should nowhere lead to identification problems.

The species accounts are necessarily brief and only point to main identification clinchers, followed by notes on habitat, status and call. Some of these appear to have been written under a severe time constraint and not to have been revised subsequently, resulting in a few confusing slips. For example, the description of Cryptic Warbler first states that the species is distinguished from Common *Neomixis tenella* and Green Jeries *N. viridis* by,

among other features, its pale legs, then goes on to say that it differs from Stripe-throated Jery *N. striatigula* by its dark legs. In some cases the name of the subspecies occurring in the region is mentioned (without any indication of its difference from others), but in most it is not. The plate on p. 157 illustrates both subspecies of Chabert's Vanga *Leptopterus chabert*, nominate and the distinctive *schistocercus*, but nowhere is this mentioned in the text. Although describing calls is notoriously difficult, their transcription rarely matched what I heard in the field during a recent visit to the region. That it can be done in a far better way is proven by the other guide. The distribution maps, although tiny, are remarkably clear. It is therefore a pity that some inaccuracies have crept in. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* is stated to be common on three of the Comoro islands, but this is not shown on the accompanying map. Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesiae*, which does not occur on Mohéli, is erroneously shown as present on all four Comoro islands. The Comoro Cuckoo Shrike *Coracina cucullata* is only mapped for Grand Comoro, although the text correctly states that it also occurs on Mohéli. Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus* is rightly said to occur on Anjouan, but it is Mohéli that is marked on the map. Even the attractive maps in the introductory chapter are not without flaws. For example, the map of Mayotte incorrectly situates Pic Combani in the southern part of the island, in the Bénara Massif, and the accompanying text presents it as the nearest stretch of montane forest from Mamoudzou, whereas this is, in fact, La Convalescence / Majimbini, which is just uphill from the town.

One more word, on the front cover. I'd be interested to hear if anyone has ever observed a tight flock of three adult male Blue Vangas as depicted!

The second guide, written by Pete Morris and Frank Hawkins, although limited to the birds of Madagascar, is substantially thicker than the other volume because it treats two species per double page spread, instead of three to six. The text is therefore much more elaborate and comprises accurate and detailed plumage descriptions, including those of all subspecies occurring on the island, followed by sections on voice, habitat and behaviour, range and status, similar species, and a particularly useful one on where to see the bird. The taxonomy is deliberately more conservative than in the first guide, with almost no new splits except a few for which there is serious evidence, such as *Threskiornis bernieri*, *Upupa marginata*, *Monticola erythronotus* and *Nesillas lantzii*. The very un-greenbul-like 'greenbuls' (which would better be named tetrakas) are still placed in the genus *Phyllastrephus* instead of *Bernieria*.

I found the transcription of vocalisations exceptionally good and extremely useful in the field.

The range and status section includes conservation status, as categorised by *Birds to Watch*[1]. Whereas this is undoubtedly useful, the indication "Not globally threatened" seems redundant and tedious. Occasionally, as for Common Jery, the distribution of the different subspecies has been omitted, and for Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, range and status in Madagascar has been forgotten altogether.

Almost all species have been illustrated with at least one, and often two photographs. Seven species, for which no photos could be found (which in the case of the widespread African Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni* is rather surprising), have been illustrated by colour paintings by Mark Andrews. Two more are illustrated by both a photograph and a painting. The quality of the photos is rather variable. Most are good, many even excellent, others fall in the category 'record shots', and a few are poor. There are a few anomalies: a vagrant that has only been recorded twice, such as Eurasian Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, is illustrated by two large photographs, one of which is a juvenile, while the endemic and widespread Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis* has to make do with a small picture in the right hand corner of the same page. A rare migrant like Common Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* has a photograph of three birds at their nesting holes—a blunder I thought seasoned authors and publishers such as these would not have made. Strangely, the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in the book is all black, but something more serious has happened to the Subdesert Mesite *Monias benschi*. A male and a female of this terrestrial species are illustrated while perching in a cramped posture in a tree. Contrary to what is stated in the text, this species normally escapes danger by running, but local guides in the Ifaty area appear to have become experts in silently approaching the birds and then suddenly frightening the wits out of them. The panicked birds then fly up in a tree, where they may remain motionless for long periods of time, thus giving all participants of even large birding groups the opportunity to see them. This disruptive way of showing the birds, of which even bird tour companies of good repute appear to make use, has, not surprisingly, made this threatened species harder to see in that particular area and interferes with an ongoing research programme. It may be worth adding that the species can usually be found in a relatively short period of time by any serious birder investigating the right habitat, even without the help of a guide or playback—although, admittedly, it may take a bit longer.

To me, the selection of photographs presented here once more illustrates both the usefulness and the limitations of a photographic guide. As a complement to a 'classic' guide with standardised paintings it proves its worth in often allowing a better appreciation of the real jizz of a species; used on its own, however, some poorly illustrated birds would be hard to identify. Luckily, in this case, the text is nothing less than excellent—but this may seem a bit ironic for a book whose illustrations are probably meant to be its main attraction.

The book has a clear layout and a rather small but still easily readable print. The meaning of the different colour bars that highlight the names of the 265 illustrated species, however, remains a mystery: at first sight the colours appear to have been used as a code to distinguish different families or species groups, but closer inspection does not bear this out. Thirteen seabird species rarely recorded in Malagasy territorial waters and three species not recorded within the last 50 years are described, without illustration, in appendices. An introductory section describes the main habitat types, which are illustrated by a map and colour photographs, and gives practical details on 19 birdwatching sites (against nine in Sinclair & Langrand).

So which book should the travelling birder take along? Although both are good value, the ideal guide has yet

to see the light. If you are visiting various islands, want to travel light and have done your homework, the first guide is the obvious choice. However, if you are only visiting Madagascar, the photographic guide, with all the details provided by its text, would be preferred. Anyone seriously interested in the birds of the region will, I'm sure, end up buying both, in addition to the original Langrand, which could then be left at home or packed in the suitcase, rather than in the hand luggage.

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Ron Demey

(with thanks to Marc Herremans for his comments referring to the Comoros)

Ny Vorona Malagasy (A Field Guide to the Birds of Madagascar)

Satoshi Yamagishi, Tomohisa Masuda and Hajanirina Rakotomanana. 1997. 160 pp, colour photos, 3 maps. Pbk. Kaiyusha Publishers Co., Ltd., 1-23-6-110, Hatsudai, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, 151 Japan. ISBN 4 905930 81 2.

This small book (measuring 13 x 19 cm) is entirely in Malagasy and Japanese and covers some 100 species, which are arranged by habitat and illustrated with colour photographs. All species are also indicated by their scientific and English names. The introduction contains 20 habitat photos. Because I'm not exactly fluent in Malagasy or Japanese, I cannot judge the quality of the short species accounts so have to limit myself to the photographs. These are of variable quality, but are generally inferior to those in the Morris & Hawkins guide reviewed above. Several are seriously out of focus. The alleged Madagascar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis* shows a mesial throat stripe and some narrow barring on the undertail-coverts and is thus in fact a Frances's Sparrowhawk *A. francesiae*[1]. The photograph of a Short-legged Ground-Roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus* is accompanied by one of the entrance of a tunnel excavated in an embankment which is apparently claimed to be its nest, although the species is now known to nest in tree holes (F. Hawkins pers. comm.).

The title page mentions that this booklet, which was sponsored by two Japanese conservation organisations, is "donated to the nature-loving children of Madagascar"—a sympathetic initiative.

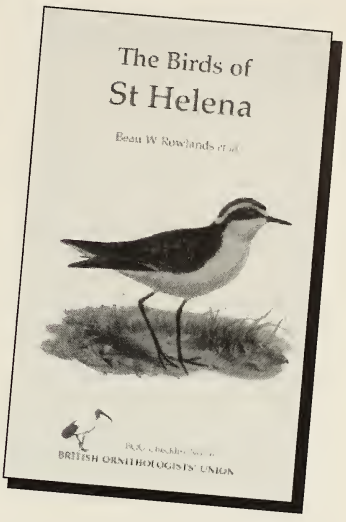
Reference

1. Morris, P. and Hawkins, F. 1998. Some comments on the identification of six Madagascar raptors. *Bull. ABC* 5: 114–119.

Ron Demey

The Birds of St Helena. An annotated Checklist

Beau W. Rowlands, Trevor Trueman, Storrs L. Olson, M. Neil McCulloch and Richard K. Brooke. 1998. 295 pp, 50 colour photographs, 3 colour and 1 black-and-white map. BOU Checklist No. 16. British Ornithologists' Union, Tring. UK£20.00.



Four of the five authors can be counted among the select band of ornithologists to have visited the remote island of St Helena, and all have made significant contributions to studies of its avifauna. This work sits well with other titles in the BOU Checklist series: it is an in-depth overview of the island's birdlife and associated material written by those truly familiar with their subject. A total of 112 species have been recorded, many as a result of human introductions and three only from the fossil record, a small total which has allowed the authors to present near-exhaustive detail on each.

Presaging the species accounts are introductory chapters describing the island's general history and communications with the outside world, the history of ornithological exploration, St Helena's geography and geomorphology, geology and pedology, climate, vegetation and habitats, land use, nature reserves, alien introductions, bird migration, breeding, guano exploitation, zoogeography, palaeornithology, other vertebrates, invertebrates, and conservation action; in short, more than enough information to satiate most readers. All of the introductory sections are technically well written, detailed and thoroughly researched. The much publicised exiling of Napoleon Bonaparte to St Helena in 1815, following his final military defeat at Waterloo, is mentioned briefly: the authors make every effort not to dwell on those few facts concerning St Helena known to most people.

Of the 112 species confirmed to occur, 34 have bred and another five, all seabirds, may have done so. Sixteen of the 23 landbirds known to breed have been introduced by man. Five of the eight extinct endemics were landbirds: St Helena Rail *Atlantisia podarces*, St Helena Crake *Porzana astrictocarpus*, St Helena Dove *Dysmoropelia dekarchiskos*, St Helena Cuckoo *Nannococcyx psix* and St Helena Hoopoe *Upupa antaios*. Three other endemics have been lost: St Helena Bulweria *Bulweria bifax*, St Helena Petrel *Pterodroma rupinarum* and St Helena Shearwater *Puffinus pacificoides*, and only an endemic plover, the Wirebird *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*, is extant. A total of 15 species no longer breed on the island—including such exotics as Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* and, ironically, House

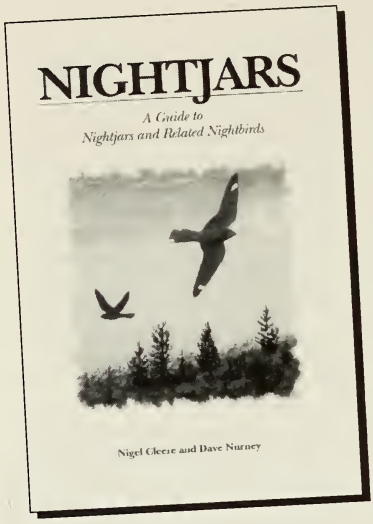
Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, usually such a successful colonist—and several seabird populations have declined.

Each species included in the systematic list is subject to thorough treatment. Full details of status and distribution, breeding data, specimens, information from the fossil record (where relevant) and world distribution are presented. Records from all offshore islets, stacks and at sea up to 200 nautical miles from St Helena are incorporated. Unconfirmed species, birds only identified to genus, or records which concern one of two possible species are unnumbered and included in square brackets. Endemics, breeding species, including introductions, and seabirds are subject to particularly detailed treatment. Those with an interest in the remarkable will enjoy leafing through this, the longest section of the book: in 1879, one farmer staged an unsuccessful attempt to introduce Ostrich *Struthio camelus* to St Helena, and the list of vagrants includes Eastern Red-footed Falcon *Falco amurensis* (one in November–December 1989).

The book closes with 54 pages of appendices: species extinct on the island prior to 1502 (the date of its discovery); extralimital species recorded within 200–500 nautical miles of St Helena (six species); a very detailed synopsis of ornithological reports; the visits and contributions made by the authors of the checklist; breeding seabird population estimates; the avifauna and physical features of offshore islands and stacks; the origins of the 18 species of vagrant landbird; details of an unidentified *Pterodroma* seen and photographed by Trueman in March 1988, and variously considered a vagrant, perhaps Murphy's Petrel *P. ultima*, or a hitherto undescribed species (see pp. 40–43); an account of the life of Fernão Lopes, the island's first settler; St Helena's game laws; and current conservation initiatives and development. A series of useful addresses, references and indices complete the work.

Collectors of the BOU series will not be disappointed by this volume, which maintains the high standard previously set, and those with a serious interest in island avifaunas particularly of the Atlantic or Afrotropical region will find it a near-irresistible purchase.

Guy M. Kirwan



Nightjars. A Guide to the Nightjars and related nightbirds

Nigel Cleere and Dave Nurney. 1998. 317 pp, 36 colour plates. Pica Press, The Banks, Nr. Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY. UK£30.

Some well-travelled birders that I know regard nightjars as "boring" presumably a reflection of the difficulty of identifying many of them. Hopefully this book will help overcome such prejudices, especially when one looks at such marvellous creatures as the Lyre-tailed *Uropsalis lyra*, Long-trained *Macropsalis creaga* and White-winged Nightjars *Caprimulgus candicans* of South America and Africa's Pennant *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* and Standard-winged Nightjars *M. longipennis*.

This book, another from the Pica Press stable, covers not only the traditional nightjars but also the Oilbird *Steatornis caripennis*, nighthawks and potoos of the Americas, the frogmouths of Australasia and Asia and the owlet-nightjars of Australasia.

A 25-page introduction covers such subjects as an explanation of the species accounts, Taxonomy & Relationships, Distribution, Topography & Morphology, Structure & Mechanics, Plumages & Moult, Behaviour and Fossil Record, and provides a fascinating overview of the group.

The colour plates follow and these will probably either by loved or loathed, depending on your appreciation or otherwise of Dave Nurney's style. Personally, I found many of the plates far too stylised although I accept the need for this to some degree for comparative purposes. Nevertheless I do feel that several of the plates fail to capture the 'real' bird, eg the Star-spotted Nightjar *Caprimulgus stellatus* on plate 26 while many of the illustrations of nightjars in flight show more than a passing resemblance to songflighting larks rather than nightjars. Furthermore, comparison of the plates with published photographs, for example those of Brown *C. binotatus* and Golden Nightjars *C. eximius* in *Bull. ABC*, does raise questions about the accuracy of the plates.

The above comments may seem harsh given that nightjars are notoriously difficult birds to illustrate well and that Dave Nurney has clearly worked hard to produce the plates, some of which are very good. Nevertheless, in a book of this nature, the accuracy of the plates is of critical importance and personal experiences coupled with a comparison of the plates with available photographs does raise questions in this respect.

As with other Pica Press monographs, the species accounts form the bulk of the book with each account covering Identification, Voice, Habitat, Habits, Food, Breeding, Description, Measurements, Moult, Geographical Variation, Distribution & Movements, Status and References. Each account also includes a range map which incorporates the range of all recognised races, eg for Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus*.

The species accounts appear both comprehensive and up-to-date, incorporating material published as recently as 1998, eg the Brown Nightjar paper published in *Bull. ABC*. Despite this, as with another recent Pica Press title—*Rails*—the number of species for which basic information is still lacking is significant, and the references to No Data Available provide an insight into the sort of information travelling birders should attempt to obtain. In Africa, for example, two species—Nechisar *Caprimulgus solala* and Prigogine's Nightjars *C. prigoginei*—remain known from single specimens or part specimens. Nigel Cleere's choice of species will doubtless draw criticism from some quarters, eg his inclusion of Black-shouldered Nightjar *C. nigriscapularis* as a distinct species.

With 24 species, 24.4% of the world's species, occurring in the Afrotropical region *Nightjars* potentially has a lot to offer birders active in the region and the detail certainly appears as comprehensive, if not more so, than that in *Birds of Africa*. Furthermore, despite the comments made above, dare I say that I also prefer the plates to those in *Birds of Africa*.

The publishers ensured that *Nightjars* appeared before volume 5 of the *Handbook of Birds of the world* which will also include these species. Nevertheless, I suspect that the ongoing success of that publication will affect sales of this volume, especially among those with only a passing interest in this family. In addition others may be tempted to wait to compare it with the forthcoming OUP publication on Nightjars before parting with their money.

In conclusion, although this book is not likely to be the last word on nightjars and their identification the author and artist should be congratulated on the end result and as such it deserves to be well read by all birders active in Africa and elsewhere.

Richard Webb

Pittas of the World. A Monograph on the Pitta Family

Johannes Erritzoe and Helga Boullet Eritzoe. 1998. 240 pp, 32 colour plates, several black-and-white photographs. The Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, UK. UK£30.00.

Until the publication of *Pittas, broadbills and asities*[1] (see review in *Bull ABC*. 4: 140–141), no comprehensive review of the pitta family had appeared since Elliot's *A Monograph of the Pittidae or Family of the Ant-thrushes*, of which the second edition was published in 1893–1895 (now a very rare and extremely valuable collectors item). This new title, therefore, is only the second monograph dealing exclusively with pittas to have ever been published. It is, in style and method of presentation, more like the classic monographs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and, given the relative uniformity of many modern-day bird books, struck a favourable note with the reviewer on this basis alone.

The book can be considered to comprise three sections: the plan of the book and family introduction; the 30 species and 67 subspecies accounts (two fewer species are recognised here than by Sibley 1996[4] and Lambert & Woodcock 1996[1]); and the plates and appendices.

The family introduction comprises much the greatest part of the first of these sections and discusses a gamut of topics: classification, origin, description, sex ratio, body mass changes in adult birds, colour patterns, distribution and sympatry, geographical variation, movements and migration, habitat, behaviour, vocalisations, food and feeding behaviour, breeding biology, longevity and mortality, moulting and abnormalities, captivity, parasites and diseases, museum diagnosis, hybridisation, status, and conservation. A little-known feature, dusky stripes which appear in many species and is unique to pittas, is described in detail for the first time. Researchers will find this section alone of significant value.

Each species is covered in great detail and the accounts are obviously the result of many hours in the museums and ornithological libraries of the western world. In a departure from the trend in other recent monograph series', references are presented within the text as well as at end of each species account, and this, to my mind, is a welcome attribute. A typical species account includes: French, German, Italian and other English names, etymology and synonyms, description (subdivided into adult male, female, nestling, juvenile, immature, bare parts and photographs of live birds), presence of dusky and glossy streaks presented in tabular form, allied species, distribution including a map showing either broad range or, for less widespread and common species, all localities traced by the author, recent records (post-1975), movements, habitat, behaviour, vocalisation, food and feeding behaviour, breeding biology, moulting and abnormalities, captivity, general notes, parasites and diseases, museum diagnosis, subspecies information (including synonyms, range, localities from specimens, identification, size, presented in tabular form, and museum holdings), hybridisation, status and conservation, references, and details of the specimens used in preparing the relevant colour plate. Although it is unclear whether Erritzoe has much field experience of pittas it is unquestionable that his research has been near-exhaustive. Nonetheless, I noticed the occasional lapse. Two of the seven records from Hong Kong of Fairy Pitta *Pitta nympha* have been missed and no post-1975 records of this species are listed for China, although a review of its status, based on observations in 1984–1996, in the south of the country has recently been published[2]. In addition, the specific name of Necklaced or Blue-banded Pitta *P. arquata* is incorrectly cited as *arcuata*, although *arquata* has precedence[1].

Completing the work are a key to the synonyms and new proposed names, a glossary, appendices listing museum acronyms, pitta species by island and their status on each, world inventories of pitta egg and nest collections, skeletons and fluid preserved specimens, a list of contributors and correspondents, and an extensive bibliography. Sandwiched within this section are the 32 colour plates: 30 single species plates, usually of a pair within habitat, and two others illustrating eggs of 21 species and nine subspecies, and a comparative, and rather cluttered, illustration of 29 species (Rainbow Pitta *P. iris* is not included), the caption to which has *P. elliotii* oddly named Bar-bellied Pitta, when Elliot's Pitta has been preferred throughout the rest of the work. I suspect many will find Woodcock's illustrations more vibrant than Helga Erritzoe's, but hers do, nonetheless, possess a certain charm. Of course, Woodcock's also illustrate a range of subspecies and, for the field birder, I assume that this will be considered a significant advantage.

In many ways, the work under review and that by Lambert & Woodcock[1] complement each other. The earlier book is written by a field ornithologist who has travelled extensively in South-east Asia, where the majority of taxa occur, and is illustrated by an artist well-versed in the requirements and constraints of field guide and identification handbook work. The Erritzoe's work is rather different, stemming as it does from seemingly exhaustive museum study, and contains a number of innovative features, the recent records section to name but one. Their conservative approach to taxonomic questions is also interesting in these times of near-revolutionary upheaval: for instance, the author considers 13 subspecies recognised by Peters[5] to be unworthy of recognition. Pitta fanatics,

of whom there are more than a few, and researchers will find this work essential, but those who need only an identification guide and less detailed synopsis of the pitta family will probably find that the Lambert & Woodcock[1] volume fulfills at least the majority of their requirements.

References

1. Lambert, F. & Woodcock, M. 1996. *Pittas, broadbills and asities.* Robertsbridge: Pica Press.
2. Lewthwaite, R. W. 1996. Forest birds in southeast China: observations in 1984–1996. *Hong Kong Bird Report* 1995: 150–203.
3. Peters, J. L. 1931–1979. *Checklist of the Birds of the World.* Vols 1–15. Cambridge, Mass: Museum of Comparative Zoology.
4. Sibley, C. G. 1996. *Birds of the World.* Version 2. Cincinnati: Thayer Birding Software.

Guy M. Kirwan

Echassiers, Canards et Limicoles de l'Ouest Africain

Olivier Girard. Illustrated by Jean Chevallier and Serge Nicolle. 1998. 135 pp, 51 colour plates and many distribution maps. Castel Editions, available from ONC, Reserve de Chanteloup, F-85340 Ile d'Olonne, France. FF70

As the author clearly states in his introduction, this is a book with a very specific purpose. "The primary objective is to help those persons involved in counts of waterbirds...in West Africa, and who possess few if any works on identification". These then are the criteria with which the book must be judged rather than against more expert and well produced monographs or wider African guides.

Olivier Girard and the Office National de Chasse in France have certainly rendered a service to those involved in wetland work in West Africa. Anyone working in the field with local co-workers will know that little material is available at reasonable prices and, at the same time, the difficulty that many of these often enthusiastic workers have in making accurate identifications, especially of species which closely, or sometimes not too closely, resemble each other. This is true even of park rangers, guides, and others working directly in the field. The book attacks this problem head-on with good plates and a short section on those species which closely resemble each other pointing out the specific differences. There are good examples of this on page 108 dealing with Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula* and Forbes' Plover *C. forbesi*, and 109 dealing with Kittlitz's Plover *C. pecuarius*, Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, White-fronted Plover *C. marginatus* and juvenile Sanderling *Calidris alba*—I suspect, from personal experience, that even a few more experienced observers may have slipped on the latter. Go back and look again!

The distribution maps are also useful and should help to avoid one or two of the more outlandish assertions one hears from time-to-time, although vagrants clearly do occur. The plates are of good quality with arrows pointing to the most important identification features, although they will not particularly excite those of us who enjoy good artwork in our bird books. They do however show the important details in good colour and they compare favourably with most average field guides, which is the essential. The introductory chapter contains several very useful ideas and hints for those involved in counts. There is also a section on wetlands and their importance, and addresses of some ringing centres, which will be useful.

There has been an effort by Wetlands International to involve local people in wetland studies in West Africa and these people will need a minimum amount of equipment and materials. Monsieur Girard's book will certainly be an important working tool.

Two quibbles! I feel that it would have been both useful and interesting to include a separate list of Asian and American vagrants as these certainly occur and may well be overlooked. Greater Sand-Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus*, Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* have been recorded in Nigeria, and several of these also occur in Ghana. It is certainly worth bringing these possibilities to the attention of new observers, even if accompanied by a cautionary remark. They are real possibilities and certainly add to the excitement! The second concerns the map of West Africa on page 7. This is of very poor quality and gives a poor impression at the beginning of the book. Dahomey has been known as the Republic of Bénin since 1975, and the full name of the former Haute Volta is Burkina Faso rather than just "Burkina", which is the popular street name for the country. People for whom the book is primarily intended can be sensitive about such matters and it is an inconsistency of presentation in the book itself.

Patrick Claffey

Madagascar Soundscapes

Victor Randrianary, Sylvie Rifflet and Jean C. Roché. 1997. 61-minute CD with 20 pp booklet in French and English. Sittelle. Available from Wildsounds, P. O. Box 9, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7XH, UK.

Given the lack of commercially available recordings of Malagasy birds (enterprising ornithologists and birders please note!), this CD provides the only readily available source of the voices of some representatives of the island's fascinating avifauna. Twenty-six bird species, many of which are endemic or nearly so, are incorporated into the three soundscapes: A day on the east coast, A day at Nosy Mangabe and A day in the far south of Madagascar. The species are: Tylas Vanga *Tylas eduardi*, Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*, Stripe-throated Jery *Neomixis striatigula*, Cryptic Warbler *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*, Crossley's Babbler *Mystacornis crossleyi*, Grey Emutail *Dromaeocercus seebohmi*, Blue Coua *Coua caerulea*, Common Newtonia *Newtonia brunneicauda*, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone mutata*, Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus*, Sickle-billed Vanga *Falculea palliata*, Greater Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis vasa*, Lesser Vasa Parrot *C. nigra*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*, Hook-billed Vanga *Vanga curvirostris*, Crested Coua *Coua cristata*, Madagascar Sandgrouse *Pterocles personatus*, Madagascar Coucal *Centropus toulou*, Madagascar Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*, Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis cana*, Madagascar Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides radiatus*, Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*, White-browed Owl *Ninox superciliaris*, Malagasy Scops-Owl *Otus rutilus* and Madagascar Nightjar

Caprimulgus madagascariensis. A few additional species appear on the background to the main recordings. Several species of lemur, also high on most visitors' agendas, are also included. Most birders travelling to Madagascar will find the invariably high-quality recordings of this CD an valuable pre-trip tool, and will be pleased to learn that the organisers project at least one follow-up volume. And, for those not yet tempted by Madagascar's avian riches, listening to this compilation may almost provide as much impetus to visit as the two recently published identification guides to the region.

Guy M. Kirwan

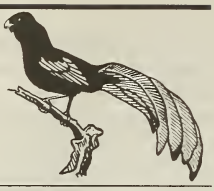
Expedition Field Techniques: bird surveys

Colin Bibby, Martin Jones and Stuart Marsden. 1998. Expedition Advisory Centre, Royal Geographical Society. 134 pp. UK £10.00.

This spiralbound work, produced in assocation with BirdLife International, will prove to be essential reading for all those undertaking census work on unfamiliar, or even familiar, avifaunas. As such, it builds on the first-named author's earlier classic work with Burgess and Hill (*Bird Census Techniques*). Those contemplating an expedition involving bird census work need to familiarise themselves with the advice contained in this thoroughly prepared book.

Guy M. Kirwan

Recent Reports



These are largely unconfirmed records published for interest only; all dates refer to 1998 unless otherwise stated. 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 and A.D. Forbes-Watson *Checklist of Birds of the Afrotropical and Malagasy Regions* or more recent or appropriate sources before submitting records.

Azores

First records for the islands included three **Chimney Swifts** *Chaetura pelagica* on 2–3 September, a **Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* on 3 September (*TCo, GE, TF & SH* per *Birding World* 11: 337) and a first-winter **Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus* on 8 November, all on Flores; a **Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola* on 10 November, on Pico, an adult **Sora Rail** *Porzana carolina* on 14 November, on San Jorge, followed by two adults and a first-winter the next day, and an immature **Eurasian Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* on 17 November, on Terceira. The second Azores record of **Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* was reported on 13 November, when two females/immatures were seen on San Jorge; the first record was in the last century (*TC, TF & FM*). A **Little Blue Heron** *Egretta caerulea* on 5–10 October, on Pico (*GE* per *Birding World* 11: 381) and a **Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias* on 14 November, on San Jorge, both constituted third Azores records (*TC, TF & FM*).

In the second half of 1998, especially in September–October, a variety of Nearctic species was reported. These included (minimum numbers in parentheses): **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* (one), **Green Heron** *Butorides virescens* (one), **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* (four), **Blue-winged Teal** *A. discors* (three), **American Black Duck** *A. rubripes* (nine), **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* (five), **Lesser Scaup** *A. affinis* (one), **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* (two), **American Coot** *Fulica americana* (two), **Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus* (one, 8 November, Flores; sixth record), **Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* (nine), **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* (six), **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* (12), **Western Sandpiper** *C. mauri* (one), **Least Sandpiper** *C. minutilla* (16), **White-rumped Sandpiper** *C. fuscicollis* (eight); **Baird's Sandpiper** *C. bairdii* (ten), **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos* (11), **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* (one), **Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* (one), **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* (five), **Solitary Sandpiper** *T. solitaria* (one); **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* (22); **Wilson's Phalarope** *Steganopus tricolor* (one), **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* (one), **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis* (seven) and **Bonaparte's Gull** *L. philadelphia* (first-winter, 11 November, Pico; fourth record).

Other interesting species included **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*, **Western Reef Egret** *Egretta gularis*, **Great White Egret** *E. alba*, **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* and **Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* (*TC, TF & TM; TCo, GE, TF & SH* per *Birding World* 11: 337; *GE* per *Birding World* 11: 381; *Dutch Birding* 20: 183–185, 247–250).

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* by Mark Andrews

Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina* by Mark Andrews

Bénin

Fieldwork conducted in the Forêt Classée de la Lama, southern Bénin, in April–May 1998, produced 14 new species for the country. Among these, the records of **Buff-throated Apalis** *Apalis rufogularis* and **Purple-headed Glossy Starling** *Lamprotornis purpureiceps* constitute the westernmost to date. The other firsts were **Blue-throated Roller** *Eurystomus gularis*, **Purple-throated Cuckoo-Shrike** *Campephaga quiscalina*, **Cameroon Sombre Greenbul** *Andropadus curvirostris*, **Slender-billed Greenbul** *A. gracilirostris*, **Red-tailed Bristlebill** *Bleda syndactyla*, **Forest Robin** *Stiphrornis erythrothorax*, **Fraser's Forest-Flycatcher** *Fraseria ocreata*, **Shrike-Flycatcher** *Megabyas flammulatus*, **Puvel's Illadopsis** *Illadopsis puveli*, **Western Black-headed Oriole** *Oriolus brachyrhynchus*, **Yellow-mantled Weaver** *Ploceus tricolor* and **Bluebill** *Spermophaga haematina* (*all MW*).

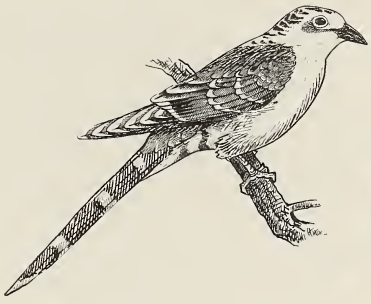
Botswana

An **African Skimmer** *Rynchops flavirostris* near Gaborone on 25 June, was well south of its expected range and is the first record for southern Botswana. Pairs of **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* repeatedly observed entering cliff crevices, in the Tswapong Hills, in November–December 1997, constitute the first indication of this species

breeding in Botswana. A large influx of **Broad-tailed Paradise Whydahs** *Vidua obtusa* occurred in the Kasana area, in late summer 1997/98. In winter 1998, a large influx of **Larklike Buntings** *Emberiza impetuani* was noted near Gaborone, with 1,800 birds coming to drink at Ruretse in a single hour.

Records recently accepted by the Records Subcommittee of the Botswana Bird Club include the following. The first record for the country of a **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* was one observed at Kasana, on 2 February 1995. Single **Peregrine Falcons** *Falco peregrinus* were recorded at Mathathane, on 18 March 1997 and at Bobonong, on 6 July 1997. Two **Corncrakes** *Crex crex* seen in the Okavango Delta on 12 December 1996 at Qaaxhwa Lediba and at Mombo, constitute the first sight records for Botswana; previous records were specimens. A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* was at Shashe Dam, on 29 November 1997. A **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* at Zabalianje Camp, Linyanti, on 2 May 1997, constitutes the country's fifth accepted record. A **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* was at King's Pool Camp, Linyanti, on 6 December 1996, and two were at Mombo, Okavango Delta, on 7 December 1996. A **Mosque Swallow** *Hirundo senegalensis* at Lobatse, on 23 March 1997 was the first record for southern Botswana and several hundred kilometres south of its expected range. A **Collared Palm-Thrush** *Cichladusa arquata* at Jedibe, Okavango Delta, on 26 October 1996, constitutes the second accepted record for the country. At Phakalane, near Gaborone, 57 **European Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris* by Craig Robson



Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti* by Mark Andrews

were trapped in November 1996–April 1997. At the same site, 29 birds were caught in November 1997–April 1998, amongst which five had been ringed there the year before (*all* per *CB*).

Canary Islands

The first **Cape Verde Shearwater** *Calonectris edwardsii* for the islands was seen from the Gomera ferry on 13 October (*TC & ER* per *Birding World* 11: 381). A **Wilson's Storm Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* was seen between El Hierro and La Gomera on 21 May, while significant numbers of **Bulwer's Petrels** *Bulweria bulwerii* were also present (*TC*). Of the latter, 39 were encountered 3–4 km west off Puerto de Tazacorte, La Palma, on 23 June (*AB* per *Dutch Birding* 20: 126). A **Madeiran Storm Petrel** *Oceanodroma castro* was observed between La Gomera and Tenerife on 24 July. A **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* was between Tenerife and La Palma on 22 May and, following the record of two birds on Fuerteventura on 20 April, what was presumably one of these birds was seen again at Puerto del Rosario on 29 May. A **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* was spotted at Solana de Jandia, Fuerteventura, on 27 September. A female **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* at Los Silos, Tenerife, was still present on 27 November, while an eclipse male and at least three female **Lesser Scaup** *A. affinis* were at Roquito del Fraile, on 28 November. A **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* was observed near Vega del Rio de las Palmas, Fuerteventura, on 28 September. A pale morph **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonorae* was near Cañadas del Rio, Fuerteventura, on 22 July (*TC*). On the same island, a juvenile **Lanner Falcon** *F. biarmicus* was seen chasing three Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* at Embalse de Los Molinos, on 3 September (*ER* per *Birding World* 11: 337).

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* by Mark Andrews

A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* was at Tejina Ponds on 6 October (*TC & ER* per *Birding World* 11: 381). The first breeding record of **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* for Gran Canaria has been confirmed this year. A **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*, reported from Corralejo, Fuerteventura, on 26 April, would constitute the first for the islands if accepted. Two **Eurasian Dotterel** *C. morinellus* were on Amarilla Golf Course, Tenerife, on 26 September (*TC*). Nearctic waders included an **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* at Embalse de Cruz Santa, Tenerife, on 16–19 October, and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* at Los Silos on 4–11 October (*TC & ER* per *Birding World* 11: 381). The first **Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* for La Gomera was seen in September (*ER* per *Birding World* 11: 337). A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* stayed at Roquito del Fraile, Tenerife, from 19 September until at least 19 October. A moulting adult **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus* was at Golf del Sur, Tenerife, on 19–21 July. A **White-rumped Swift** *Apus caffer* flew past Mirador del Rio, Lanzarote, on 16 October and an adult **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* was at Hotel Sol Gorriones, Fuerteventura, on 22 July. Two **Red-rumped Swallows** *Hirundo daurica* were observed at Morro Jable, Fuerteventura, also on 22 July (*TC*). At least five **Red-throated Pipits** *Anthus*

Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* by Mark Andrews

cervinus were at Amarilla Golf Course, Tenerife, on 25 October (*TC & ER* per *Birding World* 11: 381). A **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* was seen at Stella Canaris, Morro Jable, Fuerteventura, on 30 October, and an **Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida* at Solana de Jandia, Fuerteventura, on 27 September (*TC*).

Cape Verde Islands

The seventh **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* for the islands was recorded on São Vincente from 16 September to at least 3 October (per *Dutch Birding* 20: 250).

Egypt

The first **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* for Egypt was discovered at Aïn Sukna on 20 April. It remained alive until 29th, after which it died from gunshot wounds; the bird is thought not to have been an escape. At least three **Hume's Tawny Owls** *Strix butleri* in the Eastern Desert Mountains near Hurghada on 13 May represent a new locality for this species and the most northerly record in Africa. A **Cinereous Bunting** *Emberiza cineracea* was found in the hills along the Qattamiya road c. 45 km west of Aïn Sukna on 29 May (*M & SBD, LM* per *Birding World* 11: 216). One immature and two summer-plumaged adult **Long-tailed Skuas** *Stercorarius longicaudus* were seen flying north at Hurghada on 11 July, where a **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* was spotted on 10 July and 90 **Greater Sand Plovers** *Charadrius leschenaultii* were counted on 7 July (*DC* per *Birding World* 11: 294).

Eritrea

A trip from 3–26 February 1998 yielded the following interesting records. Three **Demoiselle Cranes** *Anthropoides virgo*, two of which in full primary moult, were in the Cieffa plain near Sen'afe on 7th. At Adi Quala, a **White-headed Vulture** *Trigonoceps occipitalis* was seen on 9th, in the company of Eurasian Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*. Also there were an **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* and a **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*. On 15 February, more than 100 **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila (rapax) nipalensis* were at the Asmara rubbish dump. Four **Pacific Golden Plovers** *Pluvialis fulva* were observed at a high-tide roost at Massawa saltpans on 24 February and a single **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* in a mixed wader flock on 23 February at Green Island, Massawa. A few **Armenian Gulls** *Larus armenicus* and **Great Black-headed Gulls** *L. ichthyaetus* were at Massawa around 20 February. Also there were up to 33 **Slender-billed Gulls** *L. genei* with 23 more at Desset River mouth. A pair of **Caspian Terns** *Sterna caspia* was breeding at Enteara islet, Dahlak archipelago, on 21 February. **House Sparrows** *Passer domesticus* were commonly seen in inland towns from Keren to Akurdat, on 11–13 February; the species is probably expanding its range (*all AdF, AM & NBa*).

Large numbers of **Brown Noddies** *Anous stolidus* were seen around the Dahlak Islands on 2 May. **Upcher's Warblers** *Hippolais languida* were recorded at the Gash River, Shemshemya, on 22 April, and near Hirghigo on 29 April (*DM*).

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* by Craig Robson

Ethiopia

Six **Little Terns** *Sterna albifrons* in non-breeding plumage at Lake Zwai, on 21 October, would appear to be an unusual record; however, the possibility that the birds may have been **Saunder's Terns** *S. saundersi* could not be totally eliminated. A male **Golden Pipit** *Tmetothylacus tenellus* was seen near Yabello on 26 October (*NB*). An **Abyssinian Ground Thrush** *Zoothera piaggae* was observed in the Simien Mountains at Jinbar waterfall, Sankaber, on 10 April; this seems to be well north of its previously known range (*DM*). Approximately 100 **Pale Rock Sparrows** *Petronia brachydactyla* were found at Akaki, south of Addis Ababa, on 19 December 1997 (*CBr*).

Gabon

A pair of **Verreaux's Batis** *Batis minima* was seen at its neatly formed cup nest high up in a fork of a tall forest tree along the Bélinga road, in north-east Gabon, on 2 September: this appears to be the first nest found of this species. Nightjars singing at Lekoni in the first week of September and initially presumed to be **Black-shouldered Nightjar** *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis* (the species widely accepted to occur in Gabon), did not respond to tape-recordings of this species' song. They did, however, strongly respond to playback of their own song, allowing close study. It appeared that these birds, a specimen of which was later found as a road kill, lacked black 'shoulders' and showed the characteristics of **Fiery-necked Nightjar** *C. pectoralis*. The tape-recorded song also resembled published recordings of the latter (*NB*).

The Gambia

A **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* photographed off Tanji Bird Reserve on 20 November 1996 constitutes the first definite record for The Gambia (*DT*). A **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* foraging near Tendaba on 23 November 1997 is the third modern record. A sub-adult **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* flying over N'jau, Central River Division (CRD), on 29 November 1997, is the first record for this division (*CB, CS, MWi, DG*). An adult **Great Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter melanoleucus* near Batelling Kiang West, Lower River Division, is the first to be seen outside of the Western Division (WD) (*CB, NL, JT*). An adult **Ayres's Hawk Eagle** *Hieraaetus ayresii* soaring over Bansang, CRD, on 11 November 1997, is the fourth Gambian record (*CB, NL, JT*). A **Shining Blue Kingfisher** *Alcedo quadribrachys*, a rare species in The Gambia, was mist-netted at

Kemboujay, WD, on 15 September 1997 (*CB, DVG, PS, PSl*). Single road kills of **Red-necked Nightjars** *Caprimulgus ruficollis* found at Sotuma Samba Foy, Upper River Division, and Jahally-Pacharr, CRD, on 11–12 November 1997 are the eighth and ninth records (*CB*, see pp.48–51). A **Singing Bush Lark** *Mirafra cantillans*, photographed at Kotu, on 17 December 1997, is the first record for the Western Division (*AT*). **Southern Grey Shrikes** *Lanius meridionalis* reported from Yundum, WD, in December 1997 (*CB*), from Tujering, WD, on 29 January 1998, and from Boa-bolon Wetland Reserve, North Bank Division, on 14 February 1998 (*PR*) are the 8–10th modern records. A complete tail feather from a **Sahel Paradise Whydah** *Vidua orientalis* collected at Belel Forest Park, CRD, on 10 December 1997 constitutes the first evidence of this

White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* by Craig Robson

species (*CB*).

Records from 1998 include the following. A nest of **White-backed Night Heron** *Gorsachius leuconotus* with two chicks, found at Kotu Stream, WD, on 25 April, further suggests that this species is an all-year breeder in the country. A displaying pair was observed at Abuko on 19 April (*SM, BGB*) and two adults with two recently fledged young were seen at Bao-bolon on 5 February (*CB, SD*). Five **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* at Dankuku on 17 February constitute the largest number for The Gambia and the first record in 18 years (*PB*). A **Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* was seen over Kudang on 2 June, while a bird showing the features of the race *beaudouini* flew over Brufut, WD, on 25 May (*CB, MW*). A pair of **Ahanta Francolins** *Francolinus ahantensis* with a half-grown chick was observed in the Abuko Nature Reserve on 26 March; this is only the second breeding record of this species in the country (*LB, CE & WF*). A flock of 150 **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles exustus* came to drink at dusk near Kaur, CRD, on 17 March; this species was previously considered rare (*PR*). The first **Senegal Plover** *Vanellus lugubris* for the country, reported from Tanji Bird Reserve on 8 December 1997 (cf *Bull. ABC* 5: 144), was last seen there on 29 March (*PR, TD*). The total of 400 **Audouin's Gulls** *Larus audouinii* counted at the Bijol Islands on 7 February is more than four times the previous count for the entire country (*PR*). A **Little Gull** *L. minutus* at Cape Point Lagoon on 8 February is the fourth Gambian record (*TA*). The sighting of a female **Golden-tailed Woodpecker** *Campethera abingoni* at Tanji Bird Reserve on 24 May is a rare record (*CB, MW*). An adult **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* in full summer plumage in the Atlantic Bird Garden, Banjul, constitutes the third definite record (*CB*). A pair of **Black-faced Firefinches** *Lagonosticta larvata* sighted in western Foni, WD, on 3 April, is the first modern record for this division; this species is considered rare and declining in The Gambia (*CB, SA*).

Ghana

A visit to the Atewa Hills Forest Reserve on 15–17 October produced sightings of **Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill** *Tockus camurus*, **Brown-eared Woodpecker** *Campethera caroli* and **Johanna's Sunbird** *Nectarinia johannae*, all of which are considered rare in Ghana. **Green-tailed Bristlebill** *Bleda eximia* was also claimed (*RF, BNo*). On 22 November, at the same locality, an **Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx olivinus*, two **Blue-headed Bee-eaters** *Merops muelleri* and another **Johanna's Sunbird** were recorded (*JS, DD*).

Kenya

A **Bronze-winged Courser** *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus* was seen near Lake Jipe on 23 June and a **Pallid (Eastern Least) Honeyguide** *Indicator meliphilus* in Sokoke Forest on 27 June; these species are local and not frequently observed. A **Pangani Longclaw** *Macronyx aurantiigula* seen west of Narok in the Masai Mara on 21 June was well west of its main range (*NB*).

Madagascar

During surveys conducted by the ZICOMA Project, the Important Bird Areas programme in Madagascar, a flock of 67 of the endangered **Madagascar Teal** *Anas bernieri* was found in a mangrove near Tambohorano, Mahajanga, on 29 May. In October, Tsaratanana Integral Reserve and Marotandrano Special Reserve, in the north-east, were both found to hold **Madagascar Serpent Eagle** *Eutriorchis astur*, **Madagascar Red Owl** *Tyto soumagnei* and **Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity** *Neodrepanis hypoxantha*. Kalambatritra Special Reserve, in the south-east, was a new site for **Cryptic Warbler** *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*, discovered there in November. At the same site **Rufous-headed Ground-Roller** *Atelornis crossleyi* was found to be relatively common. In the south-west, several individuals of the newly described **Red-shouldered Vanga** *Calicalicus rufocarpalis* were seen in spiny scrub between Itampolo and Androka, near Ampanihy, on 6–7 August. This is well to the south of the previously recognised distribution (*all ZICOMA*).

Interesting seabird species observed from Fort Dauphin, on 1–2 November 1997, included at least ten, mostly juvenile, **Shy Albatross** *Diomedea cauta* (the first multiple record), one adult **Yellow-nosed Albatross** *D. chlororhynchos*, c20 **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** *Puffinus*

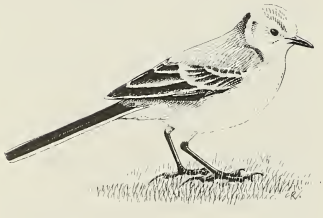
Blue-headed Bee-eater *Merops muelleri* by Mark Andrews

pacificus, the first **Flesh-footed Shearwater** *P. carneipes* observed from the Malagasy mainland, and two **Subantarctic (Brown) Skuas** *Catharacta antarctica* (*FH*).

Madeira

A mid-July pelagic trip produced a **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus*, 59 **Fea's Petrels** *Pterodroma feae*, 257 **Bulwer's Petrels** *Bulweria bulwerii*, 17,500 **Cory's Shearwaters** *Calonectris diomedea*, one **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*, 75 **White-faced Storm Petrels** *Pelagodroma marina* and 95 **Madeiran Storm Petrels** *Oceanodroma castro*, and also an **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonorae* on the Salvage Islands (*TM* per *Birding World* 11: 257).

Highlights from a pelagic during the first week of August were 36 **Fea's Petrels**, 495 **Bulwer's Petrels**, 2,250 **Cory's Shearwaters**, 20 **Little Shearwaters**, 36 **White-faced Storm Petrels**, and one dark-rumped petrel sp. (*TM* per *Birding World* 11: 294).



Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* by Craig Robson

Morocco

A record of **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* appears to have been overlooked in the discussion of this species' occurrence in Africa (Schollaert 1998, *Bull. ABC* 5: 129–130): a female or first-winter was observed at Merja Zerga on 4–5 January 1989 (*CR, DF et al.*; photo published in *Birding World* 2: 71).

A **Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* was seen at the Oued Sous on 24 and 29 October, and an **Aquatic Warbler** *Acrocephalus paludicola* at Tamri, on 29 October (*DW* per *Birding World* 11: 420).

Niger

On 4 April a female **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* was seen in the Parque National de W. This brings the number of species recorded in the Park to 352 (*PB, FL*).

São Tomé & Príncipe

At least two or three **European Swifts** *Apus apus* were positively identified near the town of São Tomé on 26 August. This would constitute the second record for the islands, the first being on 3 April 1994, when two birds were seen (*NB*).

Seychelles

First reports for Seychelles of four species were received by Seychelles Bird Records Committee during the second half of 1998, all have yet to be confirmed by the committee. These were: a **Eurasian Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* at Bamboo River, Frégate from 28 December 1997–13 January 1998, a **South Polar Skua** *Catharacta maccormicki* at sea near Aride Island from 9–25 July 1998, a **Leach's Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* at sea near Praslin on 17 November 1998 and a **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* at Cosmoledo Atoll on 24 November 1998. Two specimen records of **Eurasian Scops Owls** *Otus scops* were the second and third for this species in Seychelles: one was ship-assisted, brought to Mahé aboard a Spanish fishing vessel on 18 November 1998 which died on 23 November 1998; the second was found dead on Aride 2 November 1998. There were also two reports of **Swinhoe's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma monorhis*, the third and fourth for this species: one at sea near Praslin on 18 November 1998 and one at sea between Assumption and Aldabra on 21 November 1998. Two **Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cinerea* at Aldabra on 29 September 1998 were the second report for Seychelles. A **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* at Aride Island from 31 July–4 August 1998 was the first report of this species in the granitic islands of Seychelles sinse 1965 (the nearest breeding population being Desroches, 250 km to the west of Aride). Other notable sightings included an **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis* on Mahé, on 27–28 November 1998, two **Jouanin's Petrel** *Bulweria fallax* between Aldabra and Cosmoledo on 24 November 1998, a **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* on Mahé on 20 November 1998 and a **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus* on Denis Island on 24 November 1998 (*all AS*).

Senegal

Two immature **Egyptian Vultures** *Neophron percnopterus* were seen at Keur Lahine Fatim, Toubakouta, on 18 March, and another near Keur Ayip Ka, on 21 and 29 March. A **Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* was found near Keur Lahine Fatim on 16 April; the first record of this species in this part of the country was on 25 December 1988, and the second and third on 11 and 13 April 1990 (*BN*).

Tunisia

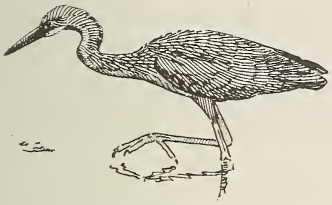
The first **Alpine Choughs** *Pyrrhocorax graculus* for the country were reported from a mountainous area near the Algerian border, between Cheblika and Metlaoui, on 26 February, when two birds were seen. On 5 May, a flock of 8–10 individuals was sighted in the same area. On 21–28 February, at least 30 **Isabelline Wheatears** *Oenanthe isabellina* were recorded; it is suggested that this species is widely overlooked or misidentified and is actually more common than generally thought (per *Alauda* 66: 247–250).

Uganda

Chapin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa lendu* appears to have become common at Buhoma, where no less than seven were seen on 26 July. Two **Puvel's Illadopsis** *Illadopsis puveli* were seen on 10 August at Kaniyo Pabidi, the species' only known location in East Africa, when first discovered in 1995 (*NB*).

Zambia

Records from January–June 1998 include the following. At the beginning of the year, in a very wet Luapula Province, both **White-winged Swamp-Warbler** *Bradypterus carpalis* and **Papyrus Yellow Warbler** *Chloropeta gracilirostris* were mist-netted along with a host of other swamp dwellers in papyrus at the mouth of the Luapula river (see pp. 56–58). Also in that area was a lone **Angola Swallow** *Hirundo angolensis*, a displaying **African Pitta** *Pitta angolensis* in Mweru Wantipa National Park, **White-winged Starlings** *Neocichla gutturalis* at a traditional spot near Nsama, an **African Hobby** *Falco cuvieri* and two **Black-bellied Seedcrackers** *Pyrenestes ostrinus* near Mporokoso and four **Black-rumped Buttonquails** *Turnix hottentotta* and



Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*
by Mark Andrews

two **Long-toed Flufftails** *Sarothrura lugens* at the Kalungwishi State Ranch. In January, waterfowl counts reflected El Niño conditions: the north of the country was extremely wet, bridges were washed away as seasonal rivers burst their banks, many areas experienced floods and numerous roads became impassable, while the south was drier than usual. Some high numbers from Lochinvar National Park included 667 **Yellow-billed Storks** *Mycteria ibis*, 2,580 **Openbill Storks** *Anastomus lamelligerus*, 114 **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus*, 580 **African Spoonbills** *Platalea alba*, 3,040 **Southern Pochards** *Netta erythrophthalma* and 3,270 **Red-knobbed Coots** *Fulica cristata*. Two **Slaty Egrets** *Egretta vinaceigula* were in the Bangweulu Swamps from where they had not been recorded for a few years, and 124 **Wattled Cranes** *Grus carunculatus* were on the Kafue Flats, where **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* was regular. **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* is mainly a passage migrant in Zambia, but it seems possible that small numbers during the austral summer are being overlooked as 80 were found at Lochinvar amongst **Red-winged Pratincoles** *G. pratincola*.

In February, **Livingstone's Flycatchers** *Erythrocercus livingstonei* and **White-throated Nicators** *Nicator gularis* were found in the Munali Hills south of Kafue, extending their ranges onto the plateau a little further. Also near Kafue, large flocks of **Parasitic Weavers** *Anomalospiza imberbis* began forming. Several **Honey Buzzards** *Pernis apivorus* were recorded through the season and a strong passage of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Aquila pomarina* was noted in Lochinvar in early March. Also there were at least three singing **Olive-tree Warblers** *Hippolais olivetorum* and a very young **Slaty Egret**—an exciting suggestion of local breeding. On farms near Choma, another **Slaty Egret** took up residence at a dam for two weeks, and a small group of **Red-billed Oxpeckers** *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* reappeared in an area from which they had been wiped out by the use of poisonous cattle dips 40 years previously. Also in March, a **Green-throated Sunbird** *Nectarinia rubescens* visited a Mwinilunga garden regularly and a **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus* was found in the Luangwa Valley, perhaps moving through on passage.

A potential first for Zambia was a **Kori Bustard** *Ardeotis kori* near Livingstone on 24 April and other notable records for that month included a flock of 17 **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus ruber* in Lower Zambezi National Park and a **Cinnamon Dove** *Aplopelia larvata* near Mpongwe.

In May, **Olive-headed Weaver** *Ploceus olivaceiceps* was found in Lukusuli National Park whilst **Bar-winged Weaver** *P. angolensis* was found again near Lusaka after a three-year dearth of sightings. In Choma, a small colony of **White-browed Sparrow-weavers** *Plocepasser mahali* was discovered as well as several **Winding Cisticolas** *Cisticola galactotes*; both were virtually unknown from the area before. In Kabwe, several **Cut-throat Finches** *Amadina fasciata* also represented an interesting northward range extension.

Several June records of **Purple (Rufous-crowned) Roller** *Coracias naevia* suggest it will be a good year for irregular dry season migrants, yet even more irregular was the sight of an unidentified *Sterna* tern near Kafue on 16 June which was probably a **Common** *S. hirundo* or **Arctic Tern** *S. paradisaea*. In the Copperbelt, significant numbers of **Red-throated Cliff Swallows** *Hirundo rufigula* were found and several **Black-rumped Buttonquails** *Turnix hottentotta* were seen on the Busanga Plain (*all PI*). ?

Wattled Crane *Grus carunculatus*
by Mark Andrews

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A new species

Otus moheliensis

Otus mobeliensis (René Marie Lafontaine)