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KAFFIR RAIL *RALLUS CAERULESCENS* IN WEST AFRICA - In casual conversation with a rice-farmer on 14 October 1978 (at the end of the wet season) near Ndop, Cameroon (06° 00' N, 10° 20' E), I was shown the head of a bird he had killed with a catapult that morning in his paddy-fields. It was clearly that of a rail. Despite a brief search I failed to see any rails 'in the field', but two days later the farmer sent me a live bird that he had just trapped. It was a Kaffir Rail *Rallus caerulescens*, its plumage and measurements conforming with the data given by Roberts (1940) for birds from southern Africa.

Consultation of the literature showed it to be well outside the hitherto known range (Fig. 1), and I prepared a specimen skin from the bird. Both specimens had incompletely ossified skulls and relatively little fat. Eastern and southern African records in Fig. 1 are from Snow (1978). The São Tomé record is an undated skin inspected by Bocage (1904, and Bannerman 1931). The Sierra Leone records are from G. D. Field (*in litt.*), who has several wet season sightings, May to October, on the Ribi River; and a specimen in the British Museum collection at Tring, taken on 19 October 1952 by T. S. Jones at Fogbo, also on the Ribi.

Habitat preferences of the rail are difficult to ascertain from the literature; it occurs in swampy areas, often at high altitude. Of the 40 specimens in the collection at the British Museum, the

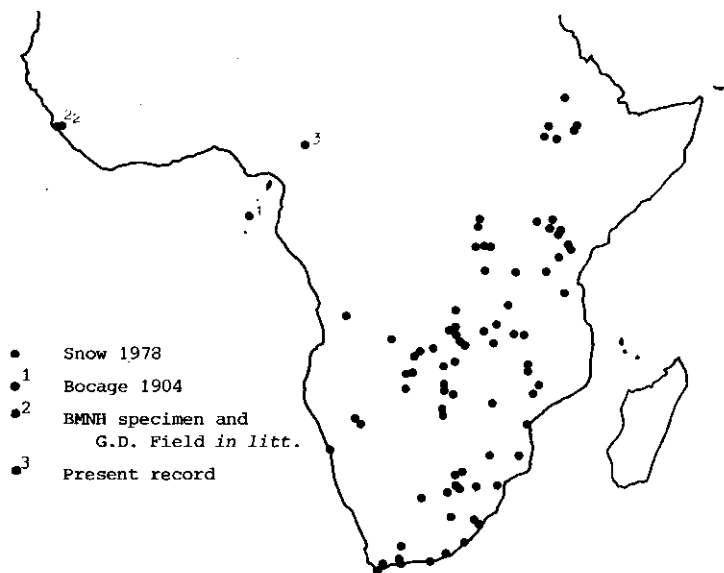


Figure 1. Distribution of Kaffir Rail *Rallus caerulescens*.

altitude is marked on 15 labels; one was collected at 2,200 ft (700 m), the remainder between 3,000 and 6,000 ft (900-1,800 m). In Angola Bocage (1877) recorded it only as a bird of the high plateaux. The Cameroon birds were at 1,100 m, but the Sierra Leone records are all from coastal localities.

Where it is known to occur, the rail is apparently not uncommon. Its potential range has certainly been extended in the Noun marshes of the Ndop Plain since the recent construction of a dam at Bamendjing and subsequent development of rice-farming.

There is no evidence to suggest that the rail is migratory in the southern and eastern parts of its range, though the seasonality of observations and the isolated São Tomé record point to the possibility of it being so in West Africa. Whether the discontinuity of its distribution is real, or merely a reflection of observer coverage, remains unknown.

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BIRDS OF THE PARC NATIONAL DE LA BÉNOUE - From 25 to 27 December 1978 I made a short visit to the Parc National de la Bénoué in northern Cameroon (08° 06' N, 13° 52' E). The reserve has been described by Kavanagh (*Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc.* 13(1977): 133-138), with a list of the birds that he recorded there. I noted most of the species listed by Kavanagh and made the following observations in addition.

- Plegadis falcinellus* One in a dry water-course.
Francolinus albogularis Occasionally seen with the next species on tracks in the reserve.
Francolinus bicalcaratus Common.
Vanellus albiceps A single bird at the main hippo pool.
Tringa hypoleucos Small numbers near the Bénoué river.
Pluvianus aegyptius One at the Bénoué gorge near the Campement du Buffle Noir.
Columba guinea Common around the Campement du Buffle Noir.