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Comment on species rejected from and added to the avifauna of Bioko Island (Equatorial Guinea)

Two of the species dealt with by Perez del Val *et al.* (1997) perhaps need further comment.

***Gyps africanus* White-backed Vulture.** Pérez del Val *et al.* (1997) rejected this species, suggesting that the only record, an adult female reported by Alexander (1903), was a misidentified Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*. The considerable differences of shape of head and bill and of size (Brown *et al.* 1982), which would be obvious in the hand, make it hard to believe that the two could be confused. Part 3 of Alexander (1903) comprises a list of birds previously recorded on Bioko, which he did not find during his visit, and which includes Palm-nut Vulture. As Alexander was an ornithologist with wide experience of W Africa by that time, it seems unlikely that he would have mistaken the two species. Unfortunately, neither is included in the list, in the accessions register, of birds collected by Alexander and presented to the British Museum (Natural History), although the entries include other birds collected at Sipopo on the same date.

Pérez del Val *et al.* remark on the distance between Bioko and the main area of distribution of White-backed Vulture. However, there is a record of White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, which is of similar range in W Africa, coming as close to Bioko as Mt Cameroon, 60 km to the NNE (Bannerman 1953) and the possibility of a vagrant White-backed Vulture in the same area should not be discounted.

Pérez del Val *et al.* write that Palm-nut Vulture was collected by the "majority of other naturalists (Allen & Thomson 1848)", but there is no reference to Palm-nut

Vulture from Bioko in either text or appendix of Allen & Thomson (1848). The only specimen listed in the accessions register of BMNH of a Palm-nut Vulture that was probably collected during the expedition is “1847.1.18.62 *Vulture angolensis* (Lath) ♂ Racama Ango (Gray) F. Po”, purchased of Fraser. The specimen no longer appears to be in the collection.

Pérez del Val (2000) and I seem to agree that this species cannot be discounted nor confirmed as a vagrant to Bioko. Pérez del Val (2000) notes that some evidence suggests that Alexander did examine a specimen. This notion is further supported by the fact that Alexander (1903) includes the species in Part 2 (p. 340) “List of species of which specimens were obtained, with Field Notes” (my italics), as also are *Psittacus erithacus* and *Actitis hypoleucos*.

***Vanellus albiceps* White-crowned Plover.** Rejected from the Bioko list by Pérez del Val *et al.* (1997), the type locality of this species is likely to remain in doubt. In the Appendix to Allen & Thomson (1848), its habitat is given as “River Quorra”, or lower Niger. The holotype was collected by Allen, probably during the Macgregor Laird expedition to the Niger in 1832. It was presented by Gould to a meeting of the Zoological Society of London, where it was introduced as “a previously undescribed plover” and, though not entirely clear, the text suggests that it was collected “during the expedition up the Quorra” (Gould 1834). The holotype was purchased by T.C. Eyton when the ZSL collection was closed down and sold in 1855; it was purchased for BMNH in 1881 and is in the type collection at Tring, curiously enough bearing an Eyton label “Fernando Po”.

Fraser (1848) noted that Allen had collected two specimens on Fernando Po, but does not say whether he is including the bird collected in 1832 or referring to others collected in 1841. If the latter, the locality will remain an enigma. It is unlikely that *V. albiceps* would have been collected in Nigeria in 1841 as, unlike the expedition of 1832, the only opportunity for collecting on the Niger was in August–October, when the river is in flood and the species is absent from southern Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994). The habitats given for four of the other 45 birds listed in the appendix of Allen & Thomson (1848) are erroneous and perhaps complete reliance should not be placed on the “River Quorra” given there for the present species.

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Reply to Moore

***Gyps africanus* White-backed Vulture.** Moore (2000) states that we suggest “that the only record [of the species on Bioko], an adult female reported by Alexander (1903), was a misidentified Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*”. Our arguments were based on the supposition that Alexander did not actually collect the bird. If he did, then I agree with Moore (2000) that we should accept White-backed Vulture as vagrant on Bioko. If he did not, then it should be rejected from the Bioko list in the light of the arguments presented by Pérez del Val *et al.* (1997).

Arguments that favour the idea that Alexander collected the bird include:

1. Alexander (1903) writes “Ad. ♀”, suggesting that he examined a specimen.

Arguments unfavourable to the idea include:

2. In Alexander’s (1903) list for Bioko there are also other species that were recorded by him but not collected (*Corvus albus*, *Actitis hypoleucos*, *Psittacus erithacus*).
3. Alexander did not observe Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*, which is common and conspicuous in Bioko (Pérez del Val *et al.* 1997).

These arguments are not definitive, and personal opinion will give more weight to some than others. At the very least, in the absence of a specimen or firmer evidence that one once existed, the record must be regarded as unconfirmed.

***Vanellus albiceps* White-crowned Plover.** We simply accepted the view of Amadon (1953) rather than that of Urban *et al.* (1986). The decision rests on whether to rely on the testimony of Allen, who collected the specimen, or Fraser, who redescribed it 16 years later. Although Moore (2000) is correct that many species collected during the Niger expeditions were wrongly attributed to locality by both Allen and Fraser, and that therefore their localities, including that of the present species, must remain in some doubt, the species cannot be regarded as having been proved to occur on Bioko.