

Short Notes — Notes Courtes

European Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* at Yankari National Park, Nigeria

In March 2005, we made a four-day visit to the Yankari National Park, in Bauchi State, E Nigeria. The Park comprises a large area of mainly dry Guinea savanna, with patches of riparian forest along watercourses. The visitor centre at Wikki Hot Springs is on a ridge, from which there is an excellent view overlooking the savanna forest that borders parts of the river. From c. 10h00 to 14h00, on 6–9 Mar we watched soaring raptors from the bar veranda. The list of soaring birds that we observed from this site included Abdim's stork *Ciconia abdimii*, Black stork *C. nigra*, Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*, River Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*, African Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides typus*, Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus (migrans) parasitus*, Brown Snake-Eagle *Circaetus cinereus*, Short-toed Snake-Eagle *C. gallicus*, Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*, Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*, Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*, Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, African Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster*, Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*, Lanner *Falco biarmicus*, and Fox Kestrel *F. alopex*.

On each day, just before noon, a few vultures took off from their roosts in the forest, into the forming thermals. We observed five species: Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*, White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* (most common of the vultures, with up to 15 birds), European Griffon Vulture *G. fulvus*, White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, and Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*.

The observations of European Griffon appear to be the first from this area (Brown *et al.* 1982, Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Borrow & Demey 2004). They were seen on all four days with up to three birds observed simultaneously. Two of them were in their third or older plumage, while one with markedly darker underwing coverts probably was in its second plumage (Forsman 1999). They were easily told apart from the similar Rüppell's Griffon Vulture *Gyps rueppellii* by their larger size and different wing-shape (based on experience of both species elsewhere), as well as the contrast between sandy brown coverts (not as dark brown as in *G. rueppellii*) and dark remiges. Furthermore, the whitish area on the median underwing coverts was diagnostic on the two older birds, which excludes Rüppell's Griffon.

The observations of European Griffon Vultures this far southeast in W Africa represent a large extension of the presumed winter range of this species. It remains to be established whether our observations represent vagrants, or if the species is regular in the region.

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Bird observations in Mali

During a visit to Mali in 2006, we spent 30 Nov to 7 Dec in the Niger delta, and visited the rice fields at Niono 9–14 Dec. We made, according to Fry *et al.* (1988), Urban *et al.* (1997) and Borrow & Demey (2004), observations that may provide range extensions for some bird species. Furthermore, we found high numbers of one European winter visitor and one intra-African migrant north of Niono.

***Chelictinia riocourii* Swallow-tailed Kite.** During the visit to Niono, we found a Swallow-tailed Kite roost in a small group of eucalyptus trees close to the town at 14°16'N, 6°0'W. During the morning of 11 Dec we counted 3690 kites flying off from the roost at 7h45–9h30. When we left the site there were still about 150 perched in the trees. During mornings when we arrived earlier, more than 500 birds left the roost before 7h30. We estimate that the roost comprised up to 4500 Swallow-tailed Kites. Approximately one third of the kites started the mornings by gathering in nearby acacia trees to the north of the roost in open fields. Here they preened and perched in the sun until about 9h00. The roost at Niono is probably the largest in Mali and was already encountered in Jan 2006, when 2480 birds were counted (J.J. Guitard & P.A. Reynaud, pers. comm.). The Swallow-tailed Kite has declined in parts of W Africa as a result of locust control during the 1980s (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001), and the roost at Niono is certainly important during the non-breeding period. Local citizens told us that the birds are seen in the area in big numbers annually, from Oct until spring (during which month the kites leave the area was not clear).