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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).

***Asio capensis* Marsh Owl.** In the area known as *Office de Niger* at Niono we visited the rice fields north of the town. Two pairs of Marsh Owls were seen at 14°31'N, 5°56'W during the evenings 11–12 Dec. One pair was displaying over a grassy area close to rice fields, while the other was seen hunting over cultivated fields close to a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* roost including 63 birds. These observations extend the known range c. 80 km westward from the Niger delta (Borrow & Demey 2004).

***Streptopelia turtur* Turtle Dove.** In the same area where the Marsh Owls were observed, a large influx of Turtle Doves occurred in the evening, with c. 8000 birds flew south to roost, probably in a tree plantation at 14°31'N, 5°57'W.

***Prinia fluiatilis* River Prinia.** In the central parts of the Niger delta between 15°13'N, 4°19'W and 14°55'N, 4°20'W, we noted 12 singing River Prinias along the riverbanks, 4–5 Dec. We had seen the species at Djoudj, Senegal, the previous month. We had good views of three of the birds in the Niger delta and they had considerable paler plumage than Tawny-flanked Prinias *P. subflava* seen during this trip and previously. The song was “smoother” than Tawny-flanked Prinia and matched perfectly sound recordings of the River Prinia (Chappuis 2000). The River Prinia has never been reported from the delta before (Borrow & Demey 2004), having most probably been overlooked.

***Acrocephalus rufescens* Greater Swamp Warbler.** Close to Niono, at 14°16'N, 6°00'W in high broad-leaved grass resembling a *Phragmites* sp., we saw one Greater Swamp Warbler and heard one singing, close to the Swallow-tailed Kite roost, 12 Dec. According to Borrow & Demey (2004) there are only doubtful records from Mali. We heard the song well for at least 2 min. in the morning and close by we observed a rather dark brown, long-billed, heavy *Acrocephalus* with a long rounded tail and all-dark legs, a prominent supercilium and a grey wash on the underparts, diagnostic of this species. The area north of Niono is probably very good for the species and a quite recent colonization could have occurred in association with increased areas of abandoned rice cultivations.

***Phylloscopus ibericus* Iberian Chiffchaff.** In a flooded area south of Lac Débo, Niger delta, at 15°16'N, 4°10'W, with plenty of bushes standing in water, we observed three Iberian Chiffchaffs and heard at least two more calling, 2–3 Dec. Song, calls and yellowish undertail-coverts all matched this species. We saw none matching Common Chiffchaffs *P. collybita* during our visit. The Iberian Chiffchaff has not been reported previously from the northern part of the Niger delta, but is only recently accepted as a full species (Sangster *et al.* 2002), which might explain why it has been overlooked.

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No confirmed record of Black-backed *Cisticola eximius* from Benin

During a visit to the Pendjari National Park, Benin, small cisticolas with heavily streaked black heads and backs contrasting strongly with the bright orange-rufous necks and rumps were observed (Salewski & Korb 2007). These birds were identified in the field, with the aid of Borrow & Demey (2004), as being Black-backed Cisticolas *Cisticola eximius*. Three species of cisticola were mistnetted at the site or in its vicinity. Besides Croaking Cisticola *C. natalensis* and Short-winged Cisticola *C. brachyptera*, a small cisticola was captured c. 200 m from the location where the presumed Black-backed Cisticolas were seen. A photograph of this bird was published as Fig. 1 in Salewski & Korb (2007) to prove the first record of Black-backed Cisticola in Benin. On later consideration I concluded, however, that the bird on the photograph was Zitting Cisticola *C. juncidis*. Unlike Black-backed Cisticola the bird on the photograph is not very rufous, but rather brownish on the back and head (Borrow & Demey 2001). It also has a faint blackish subterminal band on the brownish tail (Borrow & Demey 2004). The latter character was more obvious on another photograph of the same bird where the tail was visible from below. As the bird figured in Salewski & Korb (2007) is definitely not Black-backed Cisticola the occurrence of this species in Benin is not yet confirmed and must be deleted from the country's list. However, with respect to the above-mentioned observation of birds tentatively identified in the field as Black-backed Cisticola, a more thorough investigation may reveal the occurrence of this species in the Park.