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Received 19 February 2008; revised 5 June 2008.

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New White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* nesting areas in Ghana

White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* is a threatened endemic bird of the Upper Guinea Forest, occurring in five West African countries including Ghana. All known populations of the species are small and declining, with global population fragmented and estimated at less than 10,000 (Gatter 1997, Thompson 2007). The species is classified as Vulnerable by IUCN, and is wholly protected in Ghana under Schedule I of the Wildlife Conservation Regulation of 1971.

Rapid loss of lowland forests through logging and other forms of forest clearance are major threats confronting White-necked Picathartes in all range states (Thompson *et al.* 2004). Its specific habitat requirements render it highly vulnerable to habitat alteration and destruction. Although regularly recorded at certain sites in Ghana in the 1960s, (Grimes 1964, Grimes & Gardiner 1963, Grimes & Darku 1968) most of these sites are now degraded farmlands which are very unlikely to maintain any viable nesting sites. In 2003 Marks *et al.* (2004), recorded the species from Subim Forest Reserve, an area outside the previously known nesting areas, after nearly 40 years of no credible sighting. The Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS) has begun implementing a national action plan for the White-necked Picathartes, with a nationwide search carried out in 2005 to identify nesting sites of the species within the forests of Ghana.

Fifteen active nesting areas, with over 200 recently-used nests, were discovered in nine forest reserves (Ayum-Subim-Bonsam Bepo block, Worobong South, Southern Scarp, Nkrabea, Neung North, Afia Shelterbelt, Fum Headwaters, Onuem Nyamebe, Onuem Bepo) as well as others in off-reserve farmland areas in the Kwahu South District (Fig 1). These are mainly previously unknown nesting areas but Southern

Scarp was known to Grimes & Darku (1968). We also re-visited several nest sites in off-reserve areas in Kwahu-Tafo, Mpraeso and Aduamoah (all in Kwahu South District) that were mentioned by Grimes and Darku (1968) but of these only Aduamoah had two active nest sites. Two nest areas at Fumso in the Adansi North District of Ashanti Region, one in a farmland area and one in the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana forest reserve, correspond with those reported by McArdle (1958), but neither had any active nest.

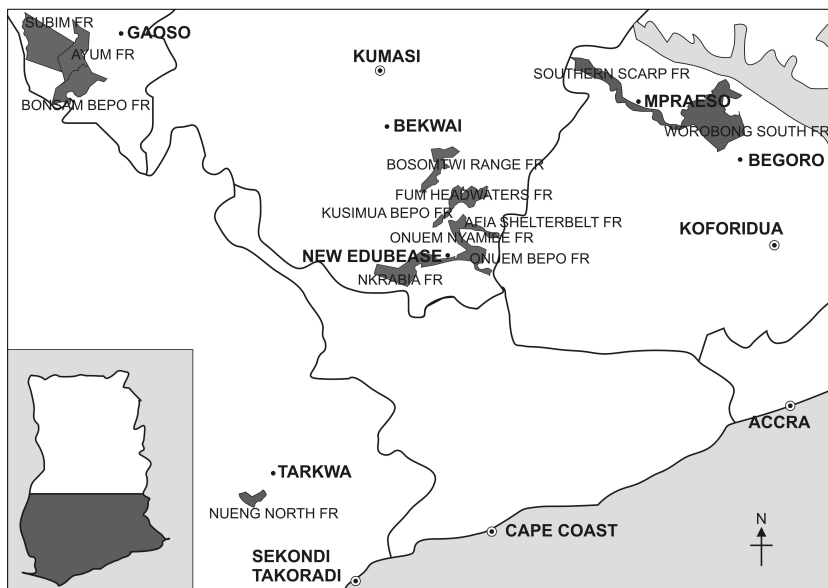


Figure 1. The high forest area of Ghana showing White-necked Picathartes nesting sites.

The Adansi South and North Districts in Ashanti Region hold five of the nine forest reserves (Nkrabea, Afia Shelterbelt, Fum Headwaters, Onuem Nyamebe, Onuem Bepo) and therefore constitute a major White-necked Picathartes breeding stronghold in Ghana. These five reserves hold over 120 active nests from about 25 nesting rock outcrops in nine nesting areas. The most important nesting areas include Breku (54 nests), Amanokrom (10), Ashlivi (8), Dotom Camp (29), Bogya (15) and Eshun (4), all in the Adansi North and South Districts.

The Adansi District nesting sites have already attracted international attention from bird watchers, with many visiting Bonkuro site in the Onuem Bepo FR since

February 2007. All visitors are accompanied by trained local guides who take care to ensure that they do not disturb the birds. There is a threat of logging in the future in parts of the reserve, including the compartment where the nests are located, which could potentially destroy the nests sites. However, the prospect for ecotourism provides a possible alternative income from these forests. GWS is therefore liaising with the Forest Services Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana to exclude logging from at least the immediate vicinity of the nests, and is working with local communities to enhance the conservation and ecotourism potential of the sites.

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds provided funding for some of the work described.

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Received 3 March 2008; revised 13 June 2008.

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