



**West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain**



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PROCEEDINGS of the FIFTH PAN AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS (held at Lilongwe, Malaŵi in 1980) edited by John Ledger, December 1984, Southern African Ornithological Society, Johannesburg. Pp. 885. £25.00. ISBN 0 620 05057 8.

The proceedings of the 5th Congress appeared 4½ years later, just before the 6th Congress (Francistown, Botswana, March 1985). The Editor is apologetic for the delay, proclaiming that when he undertook the task "without realising how much work would be involved" he had hoped for a much earlier result. But anyone with a similar task would sympathise, perhaps congratulate, on the comparatively speedy appearance of a finished volume, which is rather more than just a collection of papers presented at Congress. Speakers are notorious for promptly disappearing after a meeting into the most remote bush, to pursue their studies yet further!

Appropriately the Proceedings starts with a tribute to the late Leslie Brown, whose sad death at his home in Nairobi on 6th August 1980 occurred only three weeks before the Congress. The Chairman, the late Con Benson, in his speech of thanks at the closing of Congress, mentioned what a great organisational debt was owed to Leslie Brown, who helped to finalize the scientific program. Leslie Brown's untimely death meant that his important paper "Systematic problems in African Falconiformes" was edited and presented by R.K. Brooke.

In addition to the customary List of Delegates the preliminary sections contains a most interesting account of the history of the Congress since its inception in 1957, together with a general review of the meeting by Gérard Morel, the whole enlivened by informal photographs. Morel had had the privilege of attending all P.A.O. congresses, which reminds me of that first Congress in Livingstone, where I met not only Morel but many great earlier African ornithologists, including the late Reg Moreau and Con Benson. It is particularly gratifying to read that Mr and Mrs Mackie Niven were at Lilongwe, since it was so largely their initiative that had made the Livingstone congress possible. It is interesting to read that Professor and Dr Collias, who presented a paper on breeding of "Black-backed Weavers" in 1957, are still studying weaver biology; but they now use the West African name "Village Weaver" for this widespread species, a change which *Malimbus* readers will approve!

It is impossible in a short space to review the 57 papers presented to Congress, and it would be invidious to select any for special mention. They are grouped into 7 sections, viz.: Systematics (4 papers); Population Studies (6); Ecology (18); Conservation (8); Behaviour (4); Breeding Biology (10); and Miscellaneous (7). These numbers give some indication of the major fields of interest in Africa today.

It is surprising how fashions change in ornithological research. At the 1957 Congress major topics were migration and vocal communication, perhaps not surprising with Reg Moreau and Miles North present. But at the Malaŵi Congress there was only one paper on migration, dealing with timing of southward movement of Palaearctic migrants in Kenya, and only two on voice (both illustrated with sonograms), on duetting in barbets and food begging calls of a weaver species.

The published papers are of high standard and serious students of African Ornithology will find them essential reading and a welcome addition to their personal reference shelf. At £25 this must be regarded as good value for a no-nonsense but clearly presented volume in which almost all

papers carry clear diagrams or tables or appendices of basic data from which the conclusions have been drawn. The few photographic illustrations are of moderate quality. We are promised that the Proceedings of the 1985 Botswana PAOC will be published in 1986; let us hope that that deadline is kept.

J. H. Elgood

This volume can be obtained from: Mrs. J. Wolhuter, Southern African Ornithological Society, P.O. Box 87234, Houghton, Johannesburg, South Africa 2041.

ROBERTS' BIRDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA by Gordon L. Maclean, 5th Edition March 1985, John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, pp. li + 848 + 76 colour plates. No jacket price (about £25). ISBN 0 620 07681 X.

It must be said at the outset that this is a really splendid book that all interested in African ornithology will want to possess. From the first appearance of "Roberts" in 1940 it has been the standard work for the area south of the Cunene, Okavango and Zambezi Rivers, a marvel of compression into a single volume, yet small enough to be used in the field (many contemporary works for other areas of Africa being multi-volume series of large-format books). It is the second major metamorphosis that *Roberts Birds of South Africa* has undergone, each with new authorship, and this time the revisions have been major in almost every aspect (including the title change from *South* to *Southern Africa*).

The two most important changes are the text completely rewritten by Gordon Maclean, and the replacement of the 56 original plates of Norman Lighton by 76 modern style and much improved plates by Kenneth Newman and Geoff Lockwood (a replacement started in the 4th Edition). All but vagrant species have a coloured distribution map that shows sedentary or migratory status at a glance; but one could wish the maps indicated northward range extension towards or beyond the Equator (and surely the European Bee-eater map should distinguish Palaearctic migrants from South African breeding birds). Almost all species accounts include a sonogram, with a welcome verbal interpretation such as 'wip...wip...weeu' for the Red-chested Cuckoo; some species have two or more sonograms but it is a pity that, in the interest of spatial economy, many of the verbal interpretations can only be read with a lens.

Several additional species of birds are included, which has made it timely to revise the Roberts numbers (a decision that was "not undertaken lightly"). A major improvement is the introduction of some dichotomous keys, with an occasional comparative table for such difficult groups as Cisticolas and small waders. It is not clear what criteria have been used to decide whether to use a dichotomous key; extreme examples being a 6-page key for raptors and another (though not called a key) to separate Malachite and Pygmy Kingfishers, there being no key for Alcedinidae. The introduction includes coloured vegetation and rainfall maps which are on a larger scale than the species distributional maps, making it difficult to relate species and environments. A welcome feature is that, in addition to the useful general reference list, there are literature references for most groups and even for some species. Vernacular names have been revised; and bird names in 12 languages are listed in indexes. A minor change is that weights and measures are now in metric units.