



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



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H.Q.P. Crick, Aberdeen University, Zoology Department, Culterty Field Station, Newburgh, Ellon, Aberdeenshire AB4 0AA, UK.

REVIEW

A DELIGHT OF OWLS: AFRICAN OWLS OBSERVED by Peter Steyn, 1984, David Philip, Cape Town & Johannesburg and Tanager Books, Dover, New Hampshire. Pp 159, 24 colour plates and numerous black-and-white photographs. £18.55p. ISBN 0-88072-063-8 (Tanager Books).

If Peter Steyn is not Africa's foremost bird photographer he must be a very strong contender for the title. That is particularly true for owls, and diurnal birds of prey, with which he has cornered the market. He is rightly well known for his photographic studies of numerous other birds also; but his owls are peerless. In addition, what sets Steyn apart from practically all top-flight nature photographers in Africa is the consummate skill with which he complements the pictorial record with other field observations. I dare say, in fact, that he would prefer recognition as an ornithologist, naturalist and scientist, rather than as a wildlife photographer.

The photographs are simply magnificent studies of a dozen species of owls, and were made mostly in Zimbabwe. But the owls dealt with are all widely distributed, so the book holds far more than just southern African appeal. But widespread as they are, many of them will be barely known to most bird-watchers, and both photos and text are packed with information that readers will find excitingly new. The text is in the form of narrative essays about the 12 species: Barn, Grass, Marsh, Wood, White-faced, African Scops, Pearl-spotted, Barred, Spotted Eagle, Cape Eagle, Giant Eagle, and Pel's Fishing Owls. Owls are delightful birds, full of character and interest and biological curiosities; this is a delightful book which does them every justice, and is thus most aptly titled. It deals with little more than a third of the African owl species, in little more than a third of the continent, yet the comprehensiveness of the title is perfectly justified, for this is the first book devoted

decoys. The decoy herd was kept in the village of Margadu, on the border of Kano and Bornu States.

On 6 Nov 1985 J.S. Ash and I visited Kano State Wetland Reserve, accompanied by P. Hall (Ecologist, Bornu State), game guards, and officials from both States. We found 20 White Storks and Abdim's Storks C. abdimii, with one Cattle Egret, staked out with a large quantity of snares around them. The snares were destroyed and the birds will be kept in Maiduguri Zoo until their flight feathers have grown, when they will be released. The International Council for Bird Preservation and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, who arranged our trip to Nigeria, were very pleased that Conservation is now being given a high priority.

On the same trip we visited Kagoro and put up nets for one night. 11 birds were controlled; the longest recovery periods are shown in Schedule 2.

Schedule 1

- Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax Ringed 3/6/84, Slavonski Brod (Hrvatska) Jugoslavia, 45°08' N, 18°01' E.
Caught on fish hook, Nguru, -/2/85
- White Stork Ciconia ciconia Ringed 28/5/81, Castelo Branco, Portugal, 39°50' N, 07°11' E.

Schedule 2

Controls at Kagoro:	duration since ringed as adults*:
Olive Sunbird <u>Cyanomitra olivacea</u>	2 years 9 months
Bluebill <u>Spermophaga haematina</u>	6 " 4 " 13 days
White-browed Robin-Chat <u>Cossypha polioptera</u>	5 " 4 " 10 "
White-bellied Kingfisher <u>Corythornis leucogaster</u>	6 " 8 " 19 "
Little Green Bulbul <u>Andropadus virens</u>	5 " 4 " 24 "
Grey-headed Bristle-Bill <u>Bleda canicapilla</u>	6 " 5 " 10 "

(*for some comparable data see D.B. Hanmer, 1985, Safring News 14: 51-60).

R.E. Sharland

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to owls in Africa. In no way does it overlap or compete with any of the several other owl books which have appeared recently in Europe and the States; rather, it complements them. It does for owls what Steyn has already done for southern African birds of prey and Rowan for doves, parrots, louries and cuckoos, in putting them well and truly into the monographic literature and making the better appreciation of them readily available to all.

C.H. Fry