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NOTES ON SOME WEST AFRICAN BEE-EATERS

M.T. Horwood

These notes, mainly on the distribution of bee-eaters in Ghana and Nigeria, were abstracted in response to a request for information from C.H. Fry (see p.26), and were thought to be of sufficient interest for inclusion in the Bulletin.

Merops apiaster European Bee-eater

The records from West Africa given in Bannerman (1) are surprisingly few and far between considering that this is a common bird of passage on both southward and northward migration. I list hereunder all my records for both Ghana and Nigeria.

- 8th December 1954 Four birds in South Ghanaian Togoland.
 9th December 1954 Two separate flocks of about a dozen in the same area.
 21st March 1955. 30 plus circling over Ho in Ghanaian Togoland at mid-day had gone in the evening.
 23rd March 1955 Over 40 seen moving slowly northwards, North of Ho and just South of the Vane Pass.
 25th March 1955 Several seen over the residential area of Ho.
 28th March 1955. Many seen over the residential area at Ho.
 1st April 1958 A flock of 40-50 over Oturkpo in Idoma Division of Benue Province.
 5th April 1958 Four or five over Makurdi G.R.A. and moving in a general West-North-Westerly direction.
 11th April 1959 Three, apparently at the edge of a large flock, seen flying in a westerly direction some 10 miles to the East of Minna in Niger Province.
 25th September 1963 A flock of over 60 circling high over Kwal, 16 miles West of Bukuru and on the edge of the scarp face. Moving slowly southwards towards Kagoro and Kafanchan.

Between 1938 and 1954 I never saw one, presumably because during this period I was always stationed in the High Forest areas of S.W. Ghana. Since then I have been off and on in the savannah areas and have frequently seen them but only at the times of Spring and Autumn migrations. Further I have never known them to remain anywhere; they have always been moving in a leisurely way, feeding as they go.

Merops malimbicus Rosy Bee-eater

To state that this bee-eater is "...entirely absent from the Southern Territories of the Gold Coast..." during the rainy season is incorrect. I have one record for 2nd July 1956 at Brimsu Reservoir, 9 miles North of Cape Coast and have certainly seen it there many times

during the rains.

My Nigerian records, like my Ghanaian ones, indicate that, though it may wander, it can hardly be said to migrate. My Nigerian records are :

28th March 1958 Several at Abinsi on River Benue.
 17th April 1958 Several hundreds at Abinsi.
 23rd July 1958 Several over Kurmin Kirayi, East of Lafia (Benue Province).
 24th July 1958 Several over a kurmi some 12 miles South of Lafia on the Makurdi road.
 31st March 1960 Several over the River Niger at Lokoja.

Bombylonax breweri Black-headed Bee-eater

This bird must exist in Nigeria *, probably in the fringing forest along waterways in the Derived Savannah Zone and Southern Guinea Savannah Zone (2). My own records consist of three birds in one day, one of which was collected and sent to the Natural History Museum, South Kensington. They were seen, first a single bird and then a pair, on 6th February 1952. All were perched in the higher branches of the fringing forest along the Afram River (Ghana) and gave their presence away by flying out after passing insects.

Atrops albicollis White-throated Bee-eater

Recorded by Bannerman as wintering only in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria during the dry season. In fact it also winters in the high forest outliers in Southern Guinea Savannah (2) South of the Plateau and probably in those further to the West. I have seen it in the Plateau Province but off the plateau in December and in Zaria Province in early March. Details of date and place are :

12th May 1963 Several flying Northwards over Naraguta (Jos).
 17th May 1963 A few hawking insects over Jos
 29th May 1963 Five flying in a Northerly direction near Assob scarp on the Jos-Makurdi road.
 10th June 1963 Several flying over Naraguta (Jos) in a Northerly direction.
 7th October 1963 Nine flying Southwards near Vom.
 24th October 1962 Many flying Southwards near Rafin Bauna Forest Reserve (Jos).
 31st October 1963 Several flying Southwards near Naraguta.
 1st November 1963 20 flying Southwards near Naraguta
 4th November 1963 Many flying Southwards over Rafin Bauna Forest Reserve (Jos).
 6th November 1963 Many flying Southwards over Kuru (Jos).
 19th November 1963 Several flying Southwards over the Wase - Zurac motor road.
 13th November, 12th & 13th December 1963 Many over Kurmin Nunku (North of Akwanga) in Plateau Province.
 8th March 1964 Kurmin Kafanchan (Jema'a).
 10th - 14th March 1964 Kurmin Lamplac (Jema'a).
 9th - 11th April 1964 Ibadan

Melittophagus pusillus Least Bee-eater

This is a bird whose usual habitat is grassland or savanna but which is very quick to spread into areas where true High Forest has been destroyed and grasses such as Panicum maximum have started to colonise.

Melittophagus bullocki Red-throated Bee-eater

The following is a list of localities and dates when nesting colonies have been occupied :

cont./

* Some of about six Bombylonax breweri observed by Volsoe near Idah (Kabba Province) were collected. -Ed.

4th October 1960	Mile 72 Jos - Makurdi road.
28th October 1961	East of Abuja on the Koffi road.
28th October 1961	About mile 38 on the Jos - Makurdi (Assob scarp) road.
9th February 1962	"
14th February 1962	"
2nd August 1962	About mile 72 on the Jos - Makurdi road.
24th September 1962	On the road down the scarp from Kurra to Jekko.
(9th March 1964	None seen at the Mile 38 colony on the Jos - Makurdi road.)

In Ghana all the nesting colonies I found were occupied between 12th September and 18th February.

Dicrocercus hirundineus Swallow-tailed Bee-eater

An illusive bird which seldom seems to hang around one place for more than two or three days. My Nigerian records are :

28th December 1958	One; Minna - Kuta road.
2nd January 1959	One between Minna and Zungeru.
28th January 1964	Three; together on Shendam - Lafia dry season road.
24th February 1960	One in the rest-house compound at Okuta (Ilorin Province)
8th March 1964	One; Gimi river near Jos - Makurdi road.
12th March 1958	One; Wukari, Benue Province
18th March 1958	Two at Gboko, Benue Province
23rd March 1967	Two : Minna fuelwood reserve
9th April 1959	Two : Minna
17th April 1961	One near Zungeru
19th April 1958	One, Nasarawa, Benue Province
22nd April 1964	One and a pair South of the River Gaji in Yankari Game Reserve, Bauchi Province.
23rd April 1964	A pair at Fadaman Makkah in Yankari Game Reserve.
24th April 1964	One and three pairs between Wikki and Fadaman Galala in Yankari Game Reserve.
3rd May 1959	One, Minna.
13th May 1959	Three, Minna.
15th May 1959	Three, Minna
16th May 1959	Two, Minna Fuelwood Forest Reserve.
18th June 1960	Four, Minna
28th June 1963	One, Fibre Research Centre, Jema'a.

My Ghanaian records are 4 between 27th November and 16th February During April, May and June 1959 a total of 15 were seen in and around Minna; another between Minna and Zungeru in January 1959 and yet another in December 1958 on the Minna to Kuta road.

A total of a dozen in the Yankari Game Reserve on three days in April 1964, including 5 different pairs, was certainly exceptional. One bird of one of these pairs was perched within 10 ft. of myself and Mr Justice Holden for two or three minutes giving us not only a first class view but also letting us hear its call, a very subdued "twit" answered by its companion in a tree above and behind us. Very unlike any bee-eaters' call I have ever heard.

Its name of Swallow-tailed Bee-eater certainly describes its outline well but "Swallow-like" would be more apt, because the likeness extends quite as much to the bird in flight, which reminds me very much of the inconsequential flight of a swallow, particularly Hirundo leucosoma the Pied-winged Swallow. In fact I think it probable that its food will be found to consist of small insects rather than bees, beetles etc.; and therefore presumably more easily obtained on the wing like a swallow than from a perch like a flycatcher.

References : (1) Bannerman, D.A.

(2) Keay, R.W.J. (1959) An Outline of Nigerian Vegetation.
Lagos : Federal Government Printer.

SYNOPSIS OF THE STATUS OF BIRDS AT ILARO

J.A. Button

There follows a list of birds noted at Ilaro, 40 miles South-West of Abeokuta, Western Region, from September 1962 to April 1964. The observations were mainly on the Egbado College compound, on the periphery of the town; the College is surrounded by thick bush, and although the region is heavily cultivated, there are many local stands of very tall timber. Ilaro lies near the boundary of forest and Derived Savannah. Identification has been confirmed in a large number of cases - particularly of the shy dense-tangle-frequenting species - by examination in the hand of mist-netted birds.

a = abundant f = frequent o = occasional r = rare

d = dry season (hence od = occasional in dry season)

Ipake is the Ilaro Forest Reserve, 8 miles South of the town.

? or (?) queries status, not identification.

<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Cattle Egret	ad	<i>Phoeniculus bollei</i>	Buff-headed Wood Hoopoe	f
<i>Aviceda cuculoides</i>	West African Cuckoo-Falcon	r	<i>Corythornis leucogaster</i>	White-bellied Kingfisher	f
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	West African Black Kite	fd	<i>Ispidina picta</i>	Pigmy Kingfisher	f
<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Black-shouldered Kite	o	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>	Senegal Kingfisher	f
<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>	Lizard Buzzard	f	<i>H. leucocephala</i>	Grey-headed Kingfisher	o
<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>	Palm-Nut Vulture	o	<i>Merops malimbicus</i>	Rosy Bee-eater	f
<i>Accipiter badius</i>	Shikra	f	<i>Aerops albicollis</i>	White-throated Bee-eater	ad
<i>A. macroscelides</i>	West African Goshawk	f	<i>Melittophagus gularis</i>	Black Bee-eater	r
<i>Gymgenys typicus</i>	West African Harrier-Hawk	f (in rains)	<i>Bycanistes sharpei</i>	Laughing Hornbill	f
<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	Double-spurred Francolin	f (" ?)	<i>Lophoceros semifasciatus</i>	Allied Hornbill	a
<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	Red-eyed Turtle Dove	f	<i>L. caninus</i>	Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill	o
<i>Tympanistra tympanistra</i>	Tambourine Dove	f	<i>L. hartlaubi</i>	Black Dwarf Hornbill	r
<i>Turtur afer</i>	Red-billed Wood Dove	a	<i>Tropicranus albocristatus</i>	White-crested Hornbill	f
<i>Vinago australis</i>	Green Fruit Pigeon	a	<i>Tricholaema flavipunctata</i>	Hairy-breasted Toothbill	f
<i>Tyto alba</i>	African Barn Owl	f	<i>Gymnobucco calvus</i>	Naked-faced Barbet	a
<i>Ptilopsis leucotis</i>	White-faced Owl	f	<i>Pogoniulus subsulphureus</i>	Lemon-throated Tinker-bird	f
<i>Turacus persa</i>	Gold Coast Touraco	a	<i>P. scolopaceus</i>	Speckled Tinker-bird	f
<i>Corythaecola cristata</i>	Giant Blue Plantain Eater	a	<i>Trachylaemus purpuratus</i>	Yellow-billed Barbet	f
<i>Crinifer piscator</i>	Grey Plantain Eater	f	<i>Indicator exilis</i>	Least Honey-guide	r
<i>Cuculus clamorus</i>	Black Cuckoo	f (in rains?)	<i>Campethera nivosa</i>	Buff-spotted Woodpecker	o
<i>C. solitarius</i>	Red-chested Cuckoo	f (in rains?)	<i>Mesopicos pyrrhogaster</i>	Fire-bellied Woodpecker	f
<i>Glamator levaillantii</i>	Levaillant's Cuckoo	r	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>	African Pied Wagtail	f
<i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>	Emerald Cuckoo	f	<i>Budytes flavus</i>	Blue-headed Wagtail	ad
<i>Lampronorpha caprius</i>	Didric Cuckoo	f	<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>	Plain-backed Pipit	a
<i>L. klassi</i>	Klaas' Cuckoo	f	<i>A. trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit	fd
<i>Centropus grillii</i>	Black-bellied Coucal	r	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>	Yellow-throated Longclaw	f
<i>C. leucogaster</i>	Black-throated Coucal	f	<i>Illadopsis rufescens</i>	Rufous-winged Akalat	f
<i>C. senegalensis</i>	Senegal Coucal	f	<i>Macrosphenus kempii</i>	Kemp's Bush-creeper	f
<i>Ceuthmochares aereus</i>	Yellowbill	a	<i>M. concolor</i>	Olive Bush-creeper (status?)	
<i>Caprimulgus nigriscapularis</i>	Black-shouldered Nightjar	f	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common Bulbul	a
<i>Macrodipteryx longipennis</i>	Standard Winged Nightjar	o	<i>Trichophorus barbatus</i>	Bearded Bulbul	f
<i>Scotornis climacurus</i>	Long-tailed Nightjar	ad	<i>T. calurus</i>	White-bearded Bulbul	f
<i>Micropus apus</i>	Common Swift	a (eve of rains)	<i>Bleda canicapilla</i>	Grey-headed Bristle-bill	f
<i>Collocalia affinis</i>	Little African Swift	f	<i>Thescelocichla leucopleura</i>	Swamp Bulbul	f
<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	Palm Swift	f	<i>Pyrrhurus simplex</i>	Simple Leaf-love	f
<i>Eurystomus afer</i>	Broad-billed Roller	fd	<i>Baeopogon indicator</i>	White-tailed Greenbul	f
<i>E. gularis</i>	Blue-throated Roller	o	<i>Phyllastrephus albigularis</i>	White-throated Greenbul	f