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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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N O T E S

Unusual Behaviour of an Osprey. The Osprey Pandion haliaetus is an occasional visitor to the Zaria area and I have sight records of single birds at Samaru Lake (Zaria) on 8th and 13th May 1963 and at Maska Dam (near Funtua) on 6th and 13th October 1963. The purpose of this brief note is to report the apparently uncommon behaviour of an Osprey observed near the lake on the farm at the Institute for Agricultural Research, Samaru, on 1st October 1964. The bird was observed to stalk, and to take by means of a typical plunge from 100 ft., a live mammal about the size of a small rat. The incident occurred within 50 yards of the shore of the lake which is well stocked with fish, the normal staple diet of the Osprey. Ospreys in Europe when pressed by hunger have been known (1) to take chickens and small mammals, but in this instance there should have been no such necessity.

(1) Witherby et al. (1940) The Handbook of British Birds. Vol 3, p.109.

N. J. Skinner

Bats as an Item in Bird Diets. Considering the large number of bats in most districts of Nigeria, it is remarkable how few birds of prey attempt to feed on them. One species, the Bat Hawk Machaeoramphus alcinus has adapted itself almost entirely to catching bats on the wing (although I have seen it having a shot at swifts early in the evening), but it is dangerous to assume that any bird seen going after bats is a Bat Hawk.

I have seen the Lanner Falco biarmicus pursuing bats with determination, even the Kite Milvus migrans will sometimes make rather a clumsy attempt. The Shikra Accipiter badius will take bats by perching over the exit hole in a roof and, warned by the scurry of the emerging bats, dive down with the cloud and take a bat in about one of five attempts.

My most interesting record is of a small extremely fast falcon capturing bats with great success, seen on two occasions, 21st December 1962 and again on 18th February 1963. This appeared very dark in the twilight, but was distinctly paler below and had a typical falcon moustachial streak and pointed wings. My guess is that it was a Hobby Falco subbuteo; it was certainly not any of the more usual hawks around Kaduna.

Reverting to the Bat Hawk, I have on two occasions seen it very close at hand, catching bats at a low level, when its characteristic markings can be clearly seen. More usually it is seen cruising round fairly high up making occasional swift dives after bats which it is very expert at catching, and eats on the wing. When doing this, it catches the attention and must be visible over a wide area, and it is surprising that it is not seen more frequently. My own records are very sporadic, which would appear to indicate that the bird wanders about a good deal. The dates on which

I have recorded it are :

1954 : 23.vii in Sokoto and 27.viii in Gusau
 1956 : 3.vi in Kaduna / Kaduna
 1957 : 24.vii., and 5.viii to 25.ix frequently in
 1959 : 1.vii in Kaduna
 1961 : 6.v and 12.v in Kaduna
 1962 : 19.vii in Kaduna.

D.E. Macgregor

Mist Netting Hazards. On 18th September 1964 I found a 3½ ft. long File Snake Mohelya poensis caught by the head in a mist-net set up in the bush behind Egbado College, Ilaro. The snake had obviously been attracted by the flutterings of a male Olive Sunbird Cyanomitra olivacea already in the net and had climbed five feet up the net after crossing over from nearby vegetation. Rather optimistically it had been trying to swallow the sunbird. The bird was already dead; the snake very much alive.

Once before, on 2nd February 1962, I netted a snake, this time a West African House Snake Boaedon lineatus. The mist-net had been lowered at dusk to avoid the inevitable harvest of Epulette Bats Epomophorus gambianus and lay loosely along the ground across the hunting path of the 4 ft. long snake. It got itself hopelessly entangled and unlike the File Snake could not be extricated alive.

J.A. Button

White-throated Bee-eater Eating Oil-Palm Nut Fibres. Bee-eaters are certainly amongst the more specialised birds as regards their food requirements, and I was very surprised to find oily red-orange fibres of the Oil-palm (Elaeis guineensis) 'nut' in several gizzards of a number of White-throated Bee-eaters Aerops albicollis which I collected for research purposes at Ibadan in April 1964. This food is of course extremely lipid-rich and is eaten by a very wide variety of mammals and birds etc. It is tempting to surmise that the bee-eaters eat it 'in order to' build up lipid food reserves in the body prior to their longish northwards migration to the breeding grounds. Presumably the birds strip the epicarp from the fruits in the trees, rather than descending to fallen fruits on the ground, but any observations on this score which can be made by people resident in Aerops' winter range would be greatly appreciated. C.H. Fry

Finfoot in Kaduna. The Finfoot Podica senegalensis is not an easy bird to see well, and the following note of its occurrence in Kaduna