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THE MAMBILA PLATEAU

H. Boulter

The Mambila (Mambilla, Mbala) Plateau is situated in Southern Sardauna Province and is almost completely unexplored ornithologically. Unfortunately I can only give a rough introduction to the birds, partly because I was there for a mere four days and partly because, coming as I do from the "palm-oil" belt of Onitsha, I spent a lot of time on widespread savannah birds in addition to the montane species. However the following information is given in the hope that it will encourage others to visit the Plateau and study the avifauna more thoroughly.

The Plateau is an extension of the Cameroon montane, between 5,000 and 6,000 ft. high, and forms a triangle 50 miles from North to South bounded to the South by the River Donga (or Kari) and with its apices at approximately $7^{\circ} 20' N, 11^{\circ} 5' E$; $6^{\circ} 45' N, 11^{\circ} 15' E$; and $7^{\circ} 0' N, 11^{\circ} 30' E$. From the West it is reached via Bili and Serti, from where one proceeds on a fairly rough south-westerly road to Mayp Selbi at the foot of the escarpment about 20 miles away. During the last year a rough track has been constructed up to the Plateau; Land-Rovers may traverse this quite easily but most small cars cannot. I visited the Plateau in the last week of December 1964, and was kindly given a lift up onto the Plateau, but once at the top was restricted by lack of suitable transport to the vicinity of the village of Mai Sumari. The vegetation is almost entirely montane grassland (see the sketch in Peal 1961 (1) (p.131)) and there is no thick forest in the valleys as there is at Obudu. I gather however that the trees in valleys at the South end of the Plateau are thicker, and there is fairly dense forest on the N.E. edge of the Plateau*. There is a passable dirt road from Mai Sumari to Gembu, the Provincial Headquarters on the South end of the Plateau; and there are several bush rest-houses where one may camp.

The avifauna seems to be a mixture of montane species with low-land savannah species. I shall begin by listing the birds I netted: Blue-collared Bee-eater Melittophagus variegatus variegatus (5 netted). This is a common species and the only bee-eater I recorded. My friend however reported a Carmine Bee-eater Merops rubicus from the N.E. escarpment.

Grey-headed Kingfisher Halcyon leucocephala leucocephala. Common; the only kingfisher recorded.

Sudan Sand Martin Riparia paludicola sepp. . 1 netted. Another abundant species which, like the bee-eater, was frequently seen flying low in the valleys.

* See also the several landscape photographs in Hepper, 1962 (2). -Ed.

Bouvier's Orange-tufted Sunbird Cinnyris bouveri. 1 ♂, 1 ♀ netted.
Not uncommon.

Preuss's Double-collared Sunbird Cinnyris reichenowi spp. 1 ♂. The
commonest sunbird.

Burton's Black-and-yellow Bishop Euplectes capensis phoenicomera. 1 ♂,
2 ♀. Abundant. In off-season plumage.

Black-crowned Waxbill Estrilda nonnula. Fairly common. I did not come
across the Lower Guinea E. atricapilla the range limit of which is
near here.

Common Waxbill Estrilda astrild. 5 netted.

Orange-cheeked Waxbill Estrilda melpoda. 6 netted. Both of these
estrildines were much in evidence in the evenings. The strong wind
during the day kept birds down and away from the nets.

Sight records. A complete list of the species seen has been deposited
with the Editor. These include a number of species widespread in sav-
annah, e.g. Rock Bunting Fringillaria tahapisi and Double-spurred
Francolin Francolinus bicalcaratus; widespread Palaearctic immigrants
e.g. Whinchat Saxicola rubetra and European Swallow Hirundo rustica;
and birds which occur over the whole montane system, e.g. Stonechat
Saxicola torquata (grassland) and Blue Fairy Flycatcher Erannornis
longicauda (fringing forest). Some interesting records are :

Rüppell's Griffon Gyps rüppellii. 2 or 3.

White-backed Vulture Pseudogyps africanus. Common

Common Vulture Necrosyrtes monachus. Common.

Niger Mourning Dove Streptopelia decipiens. Frequent. Apart from the
Laughing Dove Stigmatopelia senegalensis and a wood-dove Turtur sp.
this was the only species seen.

Mountain Stonechat. Abundant.

West African Fiscal Shrike Lanius collaris. 3 or 4.

Oxpecker Buphagus africanus. Seemed to prefer horses to cattle!

References

- / 129-137.
- (1) Peal, J. (1961) Local leave on Mambila Plateau. Nigerian Field 26 :
(2) Hepper, F.N. (1962) A botanist in Adamawa. Pts. I & II. Nigerian
Field 27 : 54-78 & 100-122.

NOTES

Birds of the Plateau Province - Additions. With reference to the
'Provisional Check-List of the Birds of Plateau Province over 3,000 ft.
by Ebbutt et al (Bull. N.O.S. 3 : 9) there are two possible additions
Both were reported to me by other people and there is some doubt as to
the exact locality in which the birds were found, but both are very
interesting extensions in range of forest species.

In June 1957 Mr H. Sassoon brought me the body of a Narina Trogon
that he had picked up on the Bauchi-Jos road; it was identified by