



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



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The New CHECK-LIST of NIGERIAN BIRDS

With the publication of the first number of the Bulletin in 1964 I produced a "Provisional Check-List of the Birds of Nigeria". It has always been my intention to replace this with something more informative and of course more up to date. Subsequently Roy Parker produced a new list using the White nomenclature and it became the policy of the Society to use this sometimes confusing new nomenclature in all publications. The information given in the original "Provisional Check-List" on such topics as abundance, breeding, habitat and migration had to be sparse in the extreme. There is thus no doubt that a more informative Check-list is needed and I am hoping that such a publication will appear in the near future, thanks to the interest being shown by Heinemann's Educational Books of London.

I have already been able, with generous help from Heinemann's, to circulate a number of members of the Society with a request for additional information. If you are one of those members, all I need say is that I sincerely hope you have already been able to return at least some of the rather formidable-looking set of papers asking for additional information, indeed I have been encouraged by an early response from some members now in the U.K. But possibly through overseas postage delays and change of address you have been prevented from making any returns as yet. To any such I would beg you to help with the minimum of delay. This new Check-List is likely to be a standard reference for workers in Nigeria for some years to come, and we as a Society, owe it to future workers to make it as accurate as possible. My grateful thanks to all of you!

If on the other hand you are a member of the Society who has not been specially circulated I would first offer my apologies and say that for purely financial reasons (postages being so costly today) the circulation list had to be a short one. But if you have records of any kind that you think likely to be of value in compiling a check-list please send me your data as quickly as possible. I am

particularly seeking unpublished breeding data; records of species new to or rarely reported in Nigeria; records that indicate occurrences beyond the usual limits (e.g. forest species in northerly forest patches); clear indications of seasonal movement for species other than the well documented Palaearctic migrants. Coastal records of normally marine species (Petrels, Shearwaters &c) would be specially welcome.

I insert here a sample entry so that you can gauge how the 800 plus species will be treated, though there is likely to be some stream-lining through using standard abbreviations &c. You will see that an attempt is being made to face the problems of nomenclature and my sample entry has been selected more to high-light this aspect than for any other reason. Any general comments you care to make on material included or arrangement will be fully considered.

593. Acrocephalus gracilirostris neglectus.

Ban. Calamocetor leptorhyncha neglecta. Lesser Chad Cane-Warbler.

MPG. Calamonastides gracilirostris gracilirostris
Yellow Swamp-Warbler.

Taxonomic Note: This aberrant warbler has been placed by White in Acrocephalus but given generic rank by both Bannerman (Calamocetor) and Mackworth-Præd & Grant (Calamonastides). White recognises eight races of A. gracilirostris in which he has merged the former species leptorhyncha. Of these, only neglectus, just enters West Africa around Lake Chad.

Status: Recorded only from the shores of Lake Chad, around Malam-fatori, where it is fairly common and conspicuous when singing (A.J.H.)

Breeding: Not recorded, but probably March to April (when singing) or just afterwards.

Range: The various races range from Lake Chad to South Africa: neglectus is quite local around Lake Chad.

Habitat: Swamp and reed beds.

Finally, I would like to add that I am hoping Heinemann's will agree that bona-fide members of the Society will be able to obtain their copies of the Check-List at a favourable rate. The more help I can show I have received from members of the Society, the stronger does my case become for pressing for a preferential price for members. I shall of course give clear recognition of important data, as I have done to Tony Hopson (A.J.H.) in the sample entry.

John Elgood, 11 Parkside Avenue, Littlehampton, Sussex.

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TERN NUMBERS AT ACCRA DURING AUTUMN

L. G. Grimes.

Ringling recoveries indicate that Palaearctic terns (involving several species) move along the West African coast in Autumn, and visual evidence confirms this. However, visual counts during daylight (dawn to dusk) always yield disappointing results and the numbers of terns are far less than expected. At saltpans west of Accra the numbers recorded fluctuate but are generally well below a thousand; occasionally, however, an early morning count has yielded c 10,000 terns. At Lagos, D.I.M. Wallace (Ibis 115:559) similarly recorded few terns during daylight and found them less abundant in Autumn than in Spring.

Recent observations at the saltpans made at night and in the hour before dawn reveal that large numbers (c 30,000-50,000) of terns come in from their off-shore feeding areas to roost at the saltpans. They all invariably leave the pans for their feeding areas in the hour before dawn. These roosting flights were revealed by an air surveillance radar but it is only recently that an estimate of the numbers involved has been made.

Thus daylight counts of terns bear no relation to the actual numbers of terns present in the off-shore waters of Ghana. This is probably true for other coastal areas of West Africa but this awaits confirmation.

It is hoped that other members of the Society will take up similar night observations to confirm whether what is observed at Accra is generally true.