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February / février 2010

BIRDS ON THE KAINJI LAKE SHORE AREA OF BORGU GAME RESERVE

Chris Geerling & Timothy Afolayan.

To assess the potential of the extension of the Borgu Game Reserve to the Kainji Lake a survey of the birds of that area started in September 1972.

The borgu Game Reserve in Kwara State now covers the Lake shore from the Doro River in the south to the Menai River in the north. The lake reaches its highest level in January and is at its lowest level in August. During the high water the Doro, Timo and Menai Rivers are navigable for several miles with flat-bottomed boats. During the survey these rivers were visited successively; on one occasion (in May 1973) all three were covered in one trip.

The environment

The banks of the Lake and those of the lower reaches of the rivers are rather steep, with sandy soils on the granite along the lower Menai, and heavier soils on the Doro, Timo and upper Menai on schists.

The vegetation of the area is rather low savanna woodland, dominated by Terminalia avicennioides and Combrotum glutinosum on the granite and by Acacia species on the schists. The riparian vegetation of the rivers consists of an open belt of tall savanna trees, such as Anogeissus leiocarpus, Sterculia setigeria and Bombax costatum.

The formation of the Lake has caused considerable changes in the ecology of the area, resulting amongst other things in a typical vegetation along the shore. Dead trees, killed by the flooding, still persist along part of the shore. During the high water a mat of Echinochloa stagnina (a grass) and Polygonum senegalensis (a herb) is formed between the dead trees along the shore. Along the high water line dense tangles of Mimosa pigra (a prickly shrub) and Chloris robusta (a grass) are found. When the water falls the bare soil is colonised by annual grasses and sedges. There is no vegetation on the Lke and the rivers away from the protection of the dead trees.

The avifauna

Wells and Walsh (1969 a & b) give an extensive account of the bird fauna of Northern and Central Borgu. The present survey only concerns a small part of that area, but the Wells and Walsh paper gives the situation existing before the filling of the Lake.

The table on the next page gives an account of the commonly met birds, insofar as they are species associated with water. In addition a large number of species of the savanna woodland were seen. Interesting observations are mentioned in the following annotated list.

Long-tailed Cormorant, Phalacrocorax africanus. Frequent along the Lake shore and the rivers throughout the period of the survey. A roost in dead trees on the Lke was seen in December. In addition to about 125 Cormorants, 80 Cattle Egrets and one Squacco Heron were present. The Cormorants occupied the lower levels of the trees.

Darter, Anhinga rufa. Found in small numbers along the Lake and the rivers.

Night Heron, Nycticorax nycticorax. One observation on the Menai in March.

Squacco Heron, Ardeola ralloides. This species shows an increase in numbers towards the end of the dry season. This may be because of an increase in visibility, the water level drops and the shore is more exposed.

Cattle Egret, Ardeola ibis. This bird is associated with the Fulani herds on the shore.

Green-backed Heron, Butorides striatus. Probably quite common where sufficient cover is present.

Great White Heron, Egretta alba. Common along the open parts of the Lake and the rivers. This species and the Grey Heron are usually seen perching on dead trees. Both species have frequently been observed catching fish by plunging straight into the water and staying afloat till the prey is held sufficiently securely to fly back to a suitable perch.

L - Lake D- Doro R. T - Timo R. M - Menai R.

Species	November			December		February		
	L	D	T	L	M	L	D	T
Phalacrocorax africanus	-	1	6	125+	2	1	9	3
Ardeola ralloides	-	1	1	-	1	-	7	3
Butorides striatus	-	5	6	-	-	-	1	3
Egretta alba	-	-	2	-	4	3	8	15
Egretta garzetta	-	-	3	-	1	-	11	-
Ardea cinerea	7	8	5	-	2	2	20	1
Ardea purpurea	-	12	7	-	9	2	5	9
Dendrocygna viduata	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Plectropterus gembensis	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Anas acuta	100	-	-	7	-	-	-	-
Pandion haliaetus	-	1	-	1	2	3	4	2
Chlidonias leucoptera	-	-	-	40+	2	-	20	-

Species	March		May			June	
	L	M	D	T	M	L	M
Phalacrocorax africanus	2	5	8	7	2	1	3
Ardeola ralloides	-	2	10	7	5	-	5
Butorides striatus	-	2	3	7	-	-	4
Egretta alba	10	5	6	10	5	-	15
Egretta garzetta	-	-	1	-	2	-	-
Ardea cinerea	10	7	8	2	2	2	1
Ardea purpurea	-	18	8	-	4	1	10
Dendrocygna viduata	-	-	200+	-	600+	-	250+
Plectropterus gambensis	-	6	24	30	-	22	50
Anas acuta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pandion haliaetus	2	-	1	-	1	-	-
Chlidonias leucoptera	100+	3	40+	-	-	-	2

Little Egret, Egretta garzetta. Common along the open parts of the Lake and rivers, especially in the middle of the dry season. None seen in June, which conforms with Wells & Walsh findings.
Grey Heron, Ardea cinerea. Common in the same situations as the Great White Heron. Distinctly less numerous in June, which could mean that the greater part of the Grey Herons on the Lake are Palearctic migrants.
Black-headed Heron, Ardea melanocephala. A few observations only, in the early dry season. Not as common as recorded by Wells & Walsh, but this is more an upland species than the other Herons, which may account for its scarcity in the study area.
Purple Heron, Ardea purpurea. More common higher up the rivers than the other large herons. Apparently prefers denser vegetation or narrower streams than both the Grey Heron and the Great White Heron.
Open-bill Stork, Anastomus lamelligerus. Two birds on the Timo in February. Markedly less common than recorded by Wells and Walsh.
Woolly-necked Stork, Ciconia episcopus. Three birds along the Menai in March, also in some numbers along the Oli River in the same period. According to Wells & Walsh then on northward passage.
Hadada, Bostrychia hagedash. Not particularly common along the upper reaches of the rivers.
White-faced Tree-duck, Dendrocygna viduata. Only seen in May and June, but then in large numbers. Wells & Walsh do not mention any seasonality but they recorded gatherings in March and April, together with the next species.
Spur-winged Goose, Plectropterus gambiensis. Common later in the dry season and found together with the previous species.
Knob-billed Goose, Sarkidiornis melanotos. Only seen in May and June.
Pygmy Goose, Nettapus auritus. Two observations only, in November and May. Its habitat, weed and lily-covered water is not extensive in the survey area.

Pintail, Anas acuta. A few flocks on the Lake in November and December.

Hottentot Teal, Anas hottentota. One bird on the Menai in May. Not recorded by Wells & Walsh.

Long-legged Buzzard, Buteo rufinus. One bird on the Timo in February. Not mentioned by Wells & Walsh.

Osprey, Pandion haliaetus. Observed during the whole period of the survey but specially common in the middle of the dry season. This bird, often gets caught in gill nets when diving at struggling fish. Two ringed birds came from Sweden and Finland respectively.

Black Crake, Limnocorax flavirostra. One bird seen on the Menai in December. Probably not very common as there is little cover along the Lake and the rivers.

Finfoot, Podica senegalensis. Two birds on the Timo in November, not recorded by Wells & Walsh.

Jacana, Actophilornis africana. In small numbers along the Lake and the rivers. Little suitable habitat present.

Common Sandpiper, Tringa hypoleucos. A few birds throughout the period of the survey.

Spur-winged Plover, Vanellus spinosus. Only records from the end of the dry season. Possibly attracted by the bare ground on the shore of the retreating Lake.

Grey-headed Gull, Larus cirrocephalus. Not seen in the survey area, but 15 birds observed near the spillways of the Dam in April.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, Larus fuscus. One juvenile, possibly of this species, over the Lake in December.

White-winged Black Tern, Chlidonias leucoptera. Very common in the middle of the dry season. Many birds had assumed breeding plumage in May. The two birds seen in June were not in breeding plumage.

Pied Kingfisher, Ceryle rudis. A few birds on the upper reaches of the rivers on each visit.

Sudan Sand Martin, Riparia palludicola. Numerous on the Lake in middle of the dry season.

Conclusion

The avifauna of this part of the Lake shore reflects the habitat: deep water, steep banks and cover for only part of the year. The notable lack of waders (only the Common Sandpiper has been observed) is due to the lack of shallow water and muddy banks. The absence of Gallinules and Moorhens is due to the lack of shallow, lily-covered water.

Acknowledgements

For one of us (C.Geerling), the survey was made possible because of the generous support of the Federal Department of Forest Research.

Reference

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RINGING IN NIGERIA 1972 & 1973. 15th and 16th ANNUAL REPORT

R. E. Sharland.

This report covers two years' ringing in Nigeria, by Brian Wood and Dr John Lang and his team at Vom, by Philip Hall at Maiduguri and Mallam Fatori and by myself in Kano in 1972.

Many thanks are due to John Lang for what he has done for ornithology on the Plateau and I hope that his team will be able to carry on. As I write, steps are being taken to start up ringing at Zaria and Dick Best has reported controlling some of the Wagtails I ringed in Kano in 1970 and 1972.