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DRY SEASON BIRDS AT ENUGU AND NSUKKA

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INTRODUCTION

By comparison with western and northern Nigeria, bird records for the eastern regions of the country are rather scanty. The one major study is that of Serle (1957); on the basis of 2500 skins, collected between 1952 and 1955, he compiled a synoptic account of the birds of the then Eastern Region.

Here I list the species identified during a visit to the University of Nigeria from the end of August 1975 to early March 1976. During this period I was resident on the Enugu Campus and later on the Nsukka Campus, about 80 km to the North, mainly in January and February. Having no car, observations were made on foot on the two campuses, with two visits to the Nyala River Valley about 25 km south of Enugu.

The areas studied at Enugu consist of a residential zone of staff houses, gardens and quarters interspersed with quite extensive areas of short grass where cattle are intermittently grazed; a surrounding zone mainly of tall elephant grass, with clearings for yams, cassava and ochra where controlled burning of the tall grass to clear land for cultivation is practised annually during the dry hammattan period; and an outermost zone where the elephant grass and small holdings merge into open Guinea Savanna with areas of rain forest containing oil palms and bananas. A small permanent stream traverses the area and during the rains there are numerous small pools. The whole of this area is figured by Serle (loc. cit.) as Relic Rain Forest and Derived Guinea Savanna.

At Nsukka, conditions are broadly similar but there is also a much larger area of cultivated land belonging to the University and containing the Botanical Gardens, and there is no open water.

I recorded about 80 species, listed below without attempt at subspecific differentiation. Seven species require further confirmation (Streptopelia vinacea, Halcyon senegalensis, Tropicranus albocristatus, Cisticola erythrops, Nectarinia cuprea, Lonchura fringilloides, L. bicolor), and my identification of warblers is best regarded as provisional as they also were often difficult to identify with conviction.

Only 13 of the species are Palaearctic migrants - Serle listed 52 species - and the dates on which each was first seen are listed in Table 1.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

The nomenclature used is that recommended by Heigham (1975) in his "Comparative nomenclature of Nigerian Birds", following White (1960-65).

Ardea cinerea One pair at Nsukka. When there was no surface water in January and February they fed on cultivated land. Serle reported a nesting colony in January 1953.

Ardeola ibis First observed at Enugu on 28 October (two birds) and in flocks by 16 November. They were still numerous when I left early in March, both at Enugu and Nsukka.

Dendrocygna viduata A flock of nine on 22 February near the Nyala river. The flocks seen by Serle on the Cross and Niger rivers were the first records from the region.

Neophron monachus Common in Enugu city and at Nsukka.

Milvus migrans Ubiquitous. A pair building in a tall tree on the Enugu Campus during February abandoned the nest later following storm damage.

Circus pygargus or C. macrourus Two males lived on the Enugu Campus from 8 September to end of October. Probably C. pygargus although Serle lists only C. macrourus.

Accipiter badius Common on the Enugu Campus and also seen at Nsukka, the commonest raptor after Milvus migrans.

Kaupifalco monogrammicus A pair seen at the Enugu Campus and a single bird seen at Nsukka. Serle found it to be an abundant resident but I found it much less frequent than the Shikra.

Elanus caeruleus One early in November and thereafter one or two about the campus at Enugu. Not seen at Nsukka.

Francolinus bicalcaratus Common on both campuses. Some very young birds already able to fly seen with adults in small flocks in February.

Crex egregia One on the Enugu Campus on 21 September. Serle had Enugu records for June and July, and Marchant (1953) recorded it at Port Harcourt and Awgu.

Gallinula chloropus One probably of this species on the Enugu Campus in late rainy season (date not recorded). Not listed by Serle.

Charadrius dubius One on the Enugu Campus from 1 September, thereafter on two or three further occasions, exact dates not recorded but not seen after September. Records exist for Enugu, Cross River and Port Harcourt.

Vanellus senegallus One on ploughland at Nsukka on about 20 January and thereafter on two subsequent visits (dates not recorded).

Tringa ochropus One from 27 December until mid February living by the stream near the Enugu campus and railway. A solitary individual frequently seen in the company of a single T. hypoleucos, and for a few weeks they seemed to behave like a pair. Recorded by Serle from Lake Uheru and Owerri.

T. hypoleucos Only the one bird seen at Enugu, generally with the T. ochropus. It disappeared early in February, before its companion.

Streptopelia semitorquata Frequent on both campuses.

S. vinacea Unconfirmed, but some of the turtle-doves at Enugu may have been this species. Both were described by Serle as common.

Table 1 Arrival dates of Palaearctic migrants

<u>Circus pygargus</u> / <u>C. macrourus</u>	8 Sep.	Enugu
<u>Charadrius dubius</u>	1 Sep.	Enugu
<u>Tringa ochropus</u>	27 Dec.	Enugu
<u>Tringa hypoleucos</u>	27 Dec.	Enugu
<u>Hirundo rustica</u>	southbound 2 Sep. northbound 22 Feb.	Enugu Nyala River
<u>Delichon urbica</u>	Last week in Oct.	Enugu
<u>Motacilla flava</u>	14 Oct.	Enugu
<u>Anthus trivialis</u>	22 Feb.	Nyala River
<u>Lanius senator</u>	Late Dec.	Enugu
<u>Saxicola rubetra</u>	1 Oct.	Enugu
<u>Hippolais polyglotta</u>	6 Jan.	Nsukka
<u>Phylloscopus trochilus</u>	19 Dec.	Enugu
<u>Muscicapa striata</u>	8 Sep.	Enugu

Turtur afer Common both at Enugu and Nsukka, especially on cultivated land at Nsukka and in the botanical gardens.

T. abyssinicus Seen at Enugu, not at Nsukka.

Centropus senegalensis Quite common on the Enugu Campus, not observed at Nsukka.

Otus leucotis One on the Enugu Campus seen on 28 November and thereafter heard until some time in February. Recorded by Serle in the Onitsha province and by Marchant (1953) at Owerri.

Caprimulgus inornatus One put up during the day from short grass on the Enugu Campus on 16 February. Serle had records from Enugu and Owerri.

Apus affinis Numerous at Enugu and particularly over the teaching hospital where they had built nests under the eaves of some of the buildings.

Cypsiurus parvus Common throughout the area.

Colius striatus Seen on the Enugu Campus at the very end of August and thereafter commonly until February when they disappeared from the area. Not seen at Nsukka. Recorded by Serle at Enugu and by Marchant at Owerri.

Ceryle rudis Once by a small lake near the Nyala River.

Ceyx picta One observed on the Enugu Campus in the late autumn, date not recorded.

Halcyon leucocephala The commonest kingfisher in the area. First seen at Enugu on 23 November and then fairly frequently. One resided at Nsukka for several weeks.

H. senegalensis Status uncertain; one, unconfirmed, by the Enugu-Nsukka roadside.

Merops pusillus A pair on cultivated land on the Nsukka Campus, between 12-16 January. This was the only bee-eater I saw. According to Serle it is locally distributed in the Onitsha, Ogoja and Owerri provinces.

Tockus nasutus Fairly common at Enugu, seen also at Nsukka. Serle listed only two records for the region, both at Enugu.

T. fasciatus One small party seen in the forest along the Enugu-Nsukka road about 19 January.

Tropicranus albocristatus One in the canopy of the rain forest along the Nsukka road. Serle recorded one from Unuagwu and quoted a record from Owerri by Marchant (1953).

Dendropicos fuscescens Probably one at Enugu on 27 December near the stream but unconfirmed. Serle collected six at Enugu, all females.

Hirundo rustica Swallows on passage were to be seen round Enugu both in February and autumn, on the dates in Table 1. Serle described them as widespread and common between September and April, but I saw none between September and February.

Delichon urbica Seen on the Enugu Campus during the last week of October and perhaps the first days of November, presumably on southward passage. Serle recorded them as passage migrants at Enugu and on the Obudu plateau.

Motacilla flava A ubiquitous winter visitor. The first fall arrived at Enugu on 14 October and birds were still present, in considerably smaller numbers, when I left early in March. They were also on the Nsukka Campus.

Anthus leucophrys An abundant resident, liking short grass near houses.

A. trivialis One on the forested banks of the Nyala river on 22 February.

Macronyx croceus A widely-distributed resident on cultivated land both at Enugu and Nsukka.

Laniarius ferrugineus Serle described this bird as rather common at Enugu; I saw only one there.

Lanius senator Serle recorded that all the birds he collected at Enugu appeared to be the Corsican race L. senator badius. Common all over the Enugu Campus from the end of December until I left in March. The darkest part of their plumage was sooty grey rather than black; the forehead also appeared grey and they may well have been the Corsican race too. Also present at Nsukka.

Dicrurus ludwigi A few on the cultivated land at Enugu, sometimes with D. adsimilis. First noted on 20 December, but never common.

Dicrurus adsimilis Only at Enugu, where scarce.

Onycognathus fulgidus The only starling observed in the area. First noted on 27 December at Enugu and thereafter in pairs or occasionally small parties. Serle obtained only one specimen at Enugu but Marchant (1953) found it common round Owerri.

Corvus albus Numerous and ubiquitous.

Pycnonotus barbatus Perhaps the commonest bird of gardens.

Saxicola rubetra With Motacilla flava, the commonest palaeartic migrant. Serle considered Whinchats to be the most abundant of the palaeartic winter visitors throughout the Ogoja and Onitsha savannas.

Turdus pelios Frequently at Enugu but not at Nsukka. Song not heard, although Serle recorded it from March to October (and nests from June to August).

Sphenoeacus mentalis Not common but observed occasionally on the Enugu Campus, generally in pairs.

Hippolais polyglotta Serle obtained five specimens at Enugu in December to February. I saw three or four together on 6 January on the Nsukka Campus.

Phylloscopus trochilus First seen at Enugu on 9 December, thereafter occasionally there but not at Nsukka. Serle described it as a common winter visitor.

Cisticola erythrops Unconfirmed. Two short glimpses at Nsukka and Enugu, where Serle found it common.

C. galactotes In January and February at Enugu. A characteristic chattering call with repetitive notes, some not unmusical. Recorded by Serle only from Onitsha.

C. eximia Seen on the Enugu Campus when I first arrived in September and again in late February when the first fresh rain fell, but absent during the dry season. Serle recorded it at both Enugu and Nsukka and remarked that the song and display flight occurred during the rains.
Prinia erythroptera February, Enugu Campus. Common in the Enugu area, also recorded in Owerri province (Serle 1957, Marchant 1942).

Muscicapa striata One at Enugu on 8 September.

Nectarinia olivacea First seen at Enugu during the first week in October and thereafter occasionally. Not at Nsukka. Recorded by Serle at Enugu and elsewhere and by Marchant (1953) in Owerri Province.

N. senegalensis Seen from time to time on the Enugu Campus but not at Nsukka.

N. chloropygia A few seen near houses on the Enugu Campus, but not common. Not seen at Nsukka.

Nectarinia cuprea Possibly once at Enugu. Requires confirmation.

N. coccinigaster Once, Enugu.

Serinus mozambicus Fairly common on the Enugu Campus from early September onwards, often in small parties in elephant grass and semi-cultivated areas.

Ploceus cucullatus Abundant at Enugu; a nesting colony in a tall tree near the Campus.

P. superciliosus A small flock at Enugu on 28 October and thereafter occasional. Recorded by Serle as fairly common on the Enugu grasslands and by Marchant (1942, 1953) as common in similar terrain in Owerri Province.

Quelea erythrops Present in small numbers on the Enugu campus from September to December, often flocking with other weavers in early November to visit new-mown grass around the houses.

Q. quelea Rather strangely, it was not mentioned by Serle (1957).

Very common on the Enugu campus from early September to early March.

Large mixed flocks of granivorous birds began to build up on the Enugu campus in October, reaching a maximum in November and dispersing with the onset of the harmattan. They include Q. erythrops, Q. quelea, Vidua macroura, V. orientalis, Hypochera sp., Euplectes orix, Passer griseus, Estrilda melpoda and Lonchura sp. and fed on short grass around the campus, especially late in the day. On 6 November, for example, a flock of several hundred was seen, with V. macroura and Q. quelea predominating.

Euplectes macrourus Common on the Enugu Campus and probably also at Nsukka, but when I was there in January and February they were less easy to identify, being in eclipse plumage.

E. orix Abundant at Enugu, and apparently resident all year. Also present at Nsukka.

Passer griseus Probably the commonest bird at both Enugu and Nsukka, frequently in large flocks. They mix freely with the other ploceids to

feed in short grass.

Vidua macroura Common on the Enugu Campus. The males were still in breeding plumage in November when flocking occurred. The males' display flight above a perched female was a daily sight on the Enugu Campus in September and October.

V. orientalis Not as common as V. macroura but seen fairly often on the Enugu Campus. Serle found it sparingly, and only about Enugu, and stated that it had not been recorded previously from this region. Both V. orientalis and V. macroura may well be present at Nsukka, but in eclipse plumage they are hard to identify among other weavers.

Vidua (Hypochera) sp. A common resident at Enugu but not seen at Nsukka. Serle listed three species at Enugu.

Estrilda melpoda Common on the Enugu Campus in small flocks.

Lagonosticta senegala Not listed by Serle, but I found small flocks fairly common around the Enugu site, though much less so than many other Ploceidae.

Lonchura bicolor Mannikins were abundant especially at Enugu. Judging by variation in beak colour, the flocks contained both L. bicolor and L. cucullata. Mannikins which appeared to be distinctly larger were seen twice on the Enugu Campus and they may have been L. fringilloides. Serle observed two in July 1959 at Uyo, Calabar Province and knew of no other record for the area.

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