



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



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Nigerian Recovery of American Sooty Tern. A Sooty Tern Sterna fuscata ringed at Bush Key, Dry Tortugas, Florida on 22nd June 1964 was recovered at Benin Airport on or about 31st January 1965. (Recovery data : Nigerian Daily Times; ringing data : U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service).

Editor

Opportunism Feeding by Senegal Coucal. Our compound has been inhabited by a pair of Senegal Coucals Centropus senegalensis for several years; they nested in 1964 about 7 feet above the ground in a large mixed Oleander Nerium indicum and Allamanda Allamanda cathartica bush. I have observed them chasing lizards along tree branches, and on 12th February 1965 I saw one catch a half-grown female Agama lizard Agama agama with its beak, hammer it several times on the ground and then swallow it whole head first. On 26th February 1965 a coucal was seen leaping up and down under a mist-net suspended in the compound; on my approach the coucal retreated into a bush some two yards away. Caught in the net I found a female Red-checked Cordon-bleu Uraeginthus bengalus, and on examination I found it was dead without apparent injury. All this time the coucal had been watching me from the nearby bush, so I threw the dead cordon-bleu on the ground in front of the coucal, which immediately left the bush, took the dead bird in its beak and flew off. On 1st March 1965 a coucal was caught by one leg only at the bottom of the net which was in the same situation as on the previous occasion. Some 18" above the coucal a female Senegal Combassou Hypochoera chalybeata was caught, and on examination I found it had a fresh shallow wound on the side of its neck, which, in my opinion, had been made by the beak of the coucal. The fact that the coucal itself got caught no doubt saved the combassou from a fate similar to that of the cordon-bleu.

I have seen several reports of coucals taking nestlings of small birds, and Lynes reported that when collecting Redd Warblers in the papyrus swamps of Darfur he had difficulty in retrieving his specimens before the coucals made off with them (Bannerman, D.A., 1933, Birds of Tropical West Africa, Vol. III p.132), but I have not seen any record of attacks on live adult birds, immobilised or otherwise.

Jacqueline F. Brotherton

The Plumage of Immature Black-throated Honey-guides. The shorter Bannerman (1953), which is doubtless in much wider possession than the 8 volume work, says of the immature Black-throated Honey-guides Indicator indicator that they 'resemble (the adult female) but have the throat and breast pale yellow', a statement which is frankly misleading for a plumage phase which is so diagnostic and different from the adult of both sexes that the immature bird was originally described as a distinct species.

On 6th March 1965 I purchased a live immature I. indicator which had just been caught on the outskirts of Zaria. The identity of the

bird at first foxed me completely; although obviously a honey-guide, it was smaller than adult I.indicator I had handled, the plumage, bill and eye were quite different in colouration to the adult, and the voice also differed, being a thin sibilant trill rather like a distant Four-banded Sand-Grouse Pterocles quadricinctus. At this time of year moreover, I would only have expected there to be adult honey-guides, since I.indicator breeds now (an important host, if not the major one, at Zaria being the Red-throated Bee-eater Melittophagus bullocki). Unless the Black-throated Honey-guide breeds at other seasons, the immature specimen, which I skinned, would be 11 or 12 months old so that the species is not sexually mature until 2+ years of age. An extraordinary thing is that I have never seen this immature plumage in the field, despite the fact that the Black-throated Honey-guide is a frequent and widespread bird in the area, and I would not regard it as excessively shy or easily overlooked.

Plumage description : whole upperside very dark olive brown except rump; most olive on forehead and mantle; the lores, ear coverts, nape, sides of neck having a dark grey wash; and the greater coverts, remiges and central two pairs of retrices being black-brown. Secondaries, secondary coverts and central two pairs of retrices narrowly edged olive green. Lower rump and upper tail coverts creamy white. Remaining tail feathers largely cream-white with slate markings as in adult. Very clear demarcation between dark upperside and pale underside : chin, throat and breast warm ochreous cream, especially the breast which might look almost pale orange in some lights in the field; remaining underparts cream paling to whitish undertail coverts. Soft parts : iris very dark brown; legs as adult; bill black 17.5mm; tarsus 17 mm; wing 95, 95 mm; tail 48 mm (much shorter than in the adult); overall length 6½ ins.; weight 28.0 gms (after several hours' captivity); sex indeterminable.

Another curious feature of this record is that the bird had been caught in a trap baited with millet; its stomach however contained beeswax. To summarise : in the field a 6½ in. bird, blackish-brown above with white rump and white outer-tail; the dark colour sharply defined from pale cream underside with yellowish or almost golden throat and breast. Note that the line of demarcation on the head falls below the eye, like e.g. a Bell-Shrike Laniarius ferrugineus.

C.H.Fry

Two Sudan Savannah Birds at Zaria. According to the map accompanying Keay's Outline of Nigerian Vegetation (1959. Lagos : Federal Govt. Printer) Zaria lies in Northern Guinea Savannah about 40 miles from the nearest boundary of this zone with the more northerly Sudan Savannah. The following two species have been thought of as Sudan thorn savannah species, and their occurrences at Zaria are therefore of some interest; the starling in particular would appear to be other-