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THE BIRDS OF UMUDIM (ONITSHA PROVINCE)

H. Boulter

Umudim is one of the four villages of Nnewi, a rural area 14 - 18 miles E.S.E. of Onitsha. It is interesting ornithologically not because of an unusual or extensive avifauna but because its vegetation is typical of a large part of Eastern Nigeria. Unfortunately I do not have enough experience to say how typical the avifauna is, but in view of its vegetation and the social environment there would seem to be a *prima facie* case for assuming Umudim to be a fairly good sample.

Most of Umudim is 'oil-palm bush', interspersed with a varying quantity of hard-wood trees. When left fallow, dense undergrowth quickly develops; but when the land is cultivated, yams, cassava and coco-yams are grown between the trees, although this also develops thick undergrowth if left uncultivated. Finally there are valley bottoms where raffia palms are dominant.

The problems of studying the birds in such an area are considerable: where the land is cultivated, the birds resort to the thick foliage of the lofty deciduous trees; where the land is uncultivated, the undergrowth is often impenetrable. In addition there is the human problem. Population density in the area is very high (c. 1,000 per square mile) and, as nearly every small boy is armed with a catapult, the birds are not surprisingly chary!

My results are based on 20 months' rather cursory observation (September 1962 to April 1964) and 10½ months' slightly more detailed study (September 1964 to July 1965). In this latter period I used a 60' x 12' mist-net. Unfortunately, as there is no suitable site for a net near my house, I was unable to have it up all the time. However, I recorded catches on 33 days in the period October 1964 to July 1965, during which time I netted 81 birds of 25 species.

The number of days in each month on which I caught birds is shown below. I was absent for much of December, January and April.

Oct. 1964	: 2	Jan. 1965	: 0	Apr. 1965	: 0
Nov. "	: 7	Feb. "	: 7	May "	: 6
Dec. "	: 0	Mar. "	: 3	Jun. "	: 5
				Jly. "	: 3

The species netted are indicated by an asterisk in the following list, with the numbers of each added in parenthesis. In no way can the birds netted be considered a typical sample of the bird population. For one thing the numbers involved are so small; secondly, many species such as the Velvet-mantle Drongo Dicrurus modestus, the Red-headed Weaver Malimbus rubricollis and the Buff-throated Sunbird Chalcomitra

adelberti are quite common but they normally resort to the higher trees and so are not liable to be caught in a ground-sited net. Thirdly some birds seem to have a greater propensity for getting themselves entangled - I suspect this is the case with the Little Green Bulbul Andropadus virens - while others, especially larger birds, seem to find it easier to get out. Thus the only occasions I caught a Yellowbill Ceuthmochares aereus, a bird which one might expect to be fairly common, was when I was removing another bird from the net. On another occasion I saw two Bushfowl Francolinus bicalcaratus fly into the net, but they escaped before I could get to them. Fourthly, the sites chosen for putting up the net were necessarily similar - i.e. gaps in thick undergrowth where human interference was least likely. Nevertheless, the fact that several of the birds caught would not otherwise have been listed, shows the value of the net.

List of Birds Observed and Netted, Umudim.

		<u>Status</u>
Cattle Egret	<u>Bubulcus ibis</u>	Dry-season visitor; uncommon
African Green-backed Heron	<u>Butorides striatus</u>	Seen occasionally near a small lake
Great White Heron	<u>Casmerodius albus</u>	Once; perching in top of a dead tree
Common Vulture	<u>Necrosyrtes monachus</u>	Common
Black Kite	<u>Milvus migrans</u>	Common dry season visitor
Lizard Buzzard	<u>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</u>	Uncommon
Bush-fowl	<u>Francolinus bicalcaratus</u>	Common
Black Crane	<u>Limnecorax flavirostra</u>	Resident in valley bottoms
Forbes' Banded Plover	<u>Afroyechus forbesi</u>	Dry season visitor; uncommon
Red-eyed Turtle-Dove	<u>Streptopelia semitorquata</u>	Very common
Red-billed Wood-Dove	<u>Turtur afer</u>	Very common ( * 3)
Green Fruit Pigeon	<u>Vinago australis</u>	Common
African Barr Owl	<u>Tyto alba</u>	Uncommon
Levaillant's Cuckoo	<u>Clamator levaillantii</u>	Rare
Didric Cuckoo	<u>Lampronorpha caprius</u>	Uncommon
Senegal Coucal	<u>Centropus senegalensis</u>	Very common
Yellowbill	<u>Ceuthmochares aereus</u>	* netted once
Standard-winged Nightjar	<u>Macrodipteryx longipennis</u>	Uncommon (Common at Onitsha)
Long-tailed Nightjar	<u>Scotornis climacurus</u>	Common ( * 2)
Palm Swift	<u>Cypselus apus</u>	Uncommon
Broad-billed Roller	<u>Eurystomus afer</u>	Dry-season visitor; common
Pygmy Kingfisher	<u>Ispidina picta</u>	Common in the rainy season ( * 9)
Senegal Kingfisher	<u>Halcyon senegalensis</u>	Common
Grey-headed Kingfisher	<u>Halcyon leucocephala</u>	Dry season visitor; common
Rosy Bee-eater	<u>Meryops malimbicus</u>	Seen once
White-throated Bee-eater	<u>Aerops albicollis</u>	Dry season visitor. Very common ( * 7)
Least Bee-eater	<u>Melittophagus pusillus</u>	Rare. (Common at Onitsha)
Allied Hornbill	<u>Lophoceros sumfasciatus</u>	Erratic
Tinker-bird	<u>Pogoniulus leucolaima</u> or <u>P. subsulphureus</u>	Occasionally observed, but probably more common than observation would suggest. Serle (2) gives only two Eastern Region records of <u>P. leucolaima</u> and very few of <u>P. subsulphureus</u> .
Speckled Tinker-bird	<u>Pogoniulus scolopaceus</u>	Probably commoner than observation would suggest.
Yellow Wagtail	<u>Budytes flavus</u>	Dry season visitor. Uncommon. (Very common at Onitsha)
Plain-backed Pipit	<u>Anthus leucophrys</u>	Uncommon
Common Bulbul	<u>Pycnonotus barbatus</u>	Very common ( * 1)
Simple Leaf-love	<u>Pyrhurus simplex</u>	Common ( * 3)
Spotted Greenbul	<u>Ixonotus guttatus</u>	Uncommon ( * 1)
Little Grey Bulbul	<u>Andropadus gracilis</u>	Uncommon
Little Green Bulbul	<u>Andropadus virens</u>	Very common ( * 14)
Swamp Bulbul	<u>Thescolocichla leucopleura</u>	Frequently heard, rarely seen
Kurrichane Thrush	<u>Turdus libonyanus</u>	Common ( * 2)
Nightingale	<u>Luscinia megarhynchos</u>	* netted once
Green Crombec	<u>Sylvietta virens</u>	Common ( * 4)

Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>	Uncommon (* 2)
European Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Numerous but erratic, on passage in the dry season
Drongo	<i>Dicrurus modestus</i> (admirabilis)	Common. (For notes on the systematic position of the Enugu population see Bannerman (1) and Serle (2).)
	<i>atactus</i> $\approx$ <i>coracinus</i>	* noted once
West African Nicator	<i>Nicator chiloris</i>	* noted once
Amethyst Starling	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>	An uncommon bird of passage (* 1)
Splendid Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprocolius splendidus</i>	Uncommon
Chestnut-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus fulgidus</i>	Very common
Olive-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris chloropygius</i>	Uncommon (* 2)
Buff-throated Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra adelberti</i>	Very common
Olive Sunbird	<i>Cyanmitra olivacea</i>	Very common (* 7)
Collared Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes collaris</i>	Common (* 3)
Chestnut-and-Black Weaver	<i>Cinnamoptyx castaneofuscus</i>	c. 40 pairs nesting in a Casuarina with Village weavers, May onwards, 1964
Yellow-mantled Weaver	<i>Melanoplocus tricolor</i>	c. 12 nests in October 1964. Erratic
Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	Very common (* 7)
Red-headed Weaver	<i>Malimbus rubricollis</i>	Common
Red-bellied Weaver	<i>Malimbus scutatus</i>	Very common (* 4)
Red-bellied Weaver	<i>Malimbus erythrogaster</i>	Uncommon. Two pairs were seen nesting with <i>M. rubricollis</i> in July 1965.
Bronze Mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullatus</i>	Uncommon
Blue-billed Mannikin	<i>Spermestes poensis</i>	Common (* 2)
Grey-crowned Negro-Finch	<i>Nigrita canicapilla</i>	Very common (* 2)
Black-bellied Seed-cracker	<i>Pirenostes ostrinus</i>	* noted once; observed occasionally at Onitsha
Blue-billed Weaver-Finch	<i>Spermophaga haematina</i>	(* 2)
Orange-cheeked Waxbill	<i>Estrilda melpoda</i>	Uncommon (* 1)
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>	Common in the rainy season

One of the more interesting features of the Nnewi avifauna is the contrast it provides with the birds of Onitsha. Being on the Niger, Onitsha has a varying number of waders such as Egyptian Plover Pluvianus aegyptius, Grey Pratincole Galachrysis cinerea, and Palearctic immigrants such as the Greenshank Glottis nebularius and Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos. In addition there are various birds which are obviously attracted to the river and its banks even though they are not waders: Rosy Bee-eater, African Pied Wagtail Motacilla aguimp, Niger Black-headed Weaver Sitagra capitalis, and Red-headed Dioch Quelea erythropis which nests in large numbers in a swamp area near the new textile factory.

However there are a large number of other birds which are to be seen at Onitsha and not at Nnewi and which mark Onitsha as being the beginning of more open savanna countryside. A brief look at two major families, Nectariniidae and Ploceidae, demonstrates this. At Nnewi the sunbirds are represented by four species the most typical of which, C. adelberti, is quite absent from Onitsha. Although, the other three overlap, Onitsha has two very common sunbirds, the Splendid Cinnyris coccinigaster and the Copper C. cupreus, which are quite absent from Nnewi. The weavers show the contrast even more strongly. Not one of the following - Yellow-mantled Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Red-bellied Weaver - is to be seen at Onitsha. On the other hand, as well as the weavers already mentioned, Onitsha has the Spectacled Hyphanturgus brachypterus, the Fire-crowned Bishop Euplectes hordacea, the Yellow-mantled Whydah Coliupasser macrourus and various others which are

absent from Nnewi.

- (1) Bannerman, D.A. (1953) The Birds of West and Equatorial Africa. Vol. 2. Edinburgh
- (2) Serle, W. (1957) A contribution to the ornithology of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. *Ibis* 99 : 371-418 & 628-685.

### SOME NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF TIVLAND

H.H. Gray

Since November 1953 I have been living in the Tiv Division of Benue Province for extended periods of time (2½ years each, followed by six months' leave) as follows : 1953-'55 at the Leprosy Settlement, Mkar (7° 20' N., 9° 02' E.), near Gboko; 1957 at Lupwe and Takum (7° 15' N., 10° 00' E.) in Wukari Division; 1958-'61 again at Mkar. Since November 1961 I have been stationed at Mbaakon, 37 miles South of Gboko. Here I am doing rural health work and so travel each month to various places in the southern areas of Tiv Division. The countryside is rolling, rising in the southernmost part to mountains up to 3,000 ft. elevation. The vegetation is Southern Guinea Savannah. At the very southern edge, contiguous with Obudu Division of Ogoja Province, and Mamfe Overseas District of West Cameroun, the forest begins. Gallery forest extends further North along the banks of some rivers.

The following notes touch on what are considered the more interesting of my observations in the area :

Abdim's Stork *Sphenorhynchus abdimii*. Visits Wukari town (7° 52' N., 9° 48' E.) each wet season, according to local informants. Several were seen there in June 1954.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. One at a stream near Naa, 45 miles South of Gboko, December 1953.

Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*. A few throughout the year at Mbaakon.

African Hawk-Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus*. One was seen in June 1954 trying to snatch a domestic duck from a compound at Zaki Biam, 50 miles E.N.E. of Gboko on the Wukari road.

Grey-breasted Helmet Guinea-Fowl *Numida meleagris*. Common in less densely populated districts where there is plenty tree cover.

Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*. A few in the dry season just West of Gboko, 1960. Two seen at Aku, 20 miles South of Gboko in December 1964. Noted at Takum in Wukari Division in January 1958.

African Button-Quail *Turnix sylvatica*. Common in cultivated areas in fallow grass fields. Heard calling mostly in the dry season until May; only rarely heard in the rains.

Long-tailed Dove *Oena capensis*. A few in the dry season, 1954, at the Leprosy Settlement, Mkar.