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PALAEARCTIC WADERS IN THE NIGER DELTA.

P. A. Smith

From May 1963 until June 1965 I was working as a seismologist with seismic exploration parties in various parts of the Delta. During this time I rarely stayed in one area for more than two months, hence observations on the birds are rather scattered, and regrettably incomplete.

1963.

May - June Ahoada and N.W. Port Harcourt Province. No records.

July Port Harcourt Province.

12th. Common sandpipers Actitis hypoleucos appeared to be common in the mangrove around Port Harcourt.

13th. Single curlew Numenius arquatus over mangrove creeks at Port Harcourt.

14th. - 31st.

Degema area.

Common Sandpipers becoming more plentiful; small flocks regularly seen. No other waders in this area.

August

Degema - Port Harcourt area.

3rd. c. 5 Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus over Port Harcourt.

21st. Single Redshank Tringa totanus.

22nd - 31st.

Bonny area, Degema Province.

In the mangrove, Whimbrel, Common Sandpipers, and Greenshank Glottis nebularius, all seen regularly.

25th. Along the nearby shore, a Turnstone Arenaria interpres.

31st. My first visit to a sandbank at the mouth of the Bonny River at high tide. I discovered it to be a favourite roost for waders, which were present in unexpected numbers and variety. Numbers of various species on this and the following day were as follows:

	31st Aug.	1st Sept.
Grey plover <u>Squatarola squatarola</u>	c. 60	c. 100
Oyster-catcher <u>Haematopus ostralegus</u>	1	-
Curlew sandpiper <u>Erolia testacea</u>	c. 1,000	c. 2,000
Sanderling <u>Crocethia alba</u>	c. 100	c. 150
Turnstone	c. 5	c. 15
Common sandpiper	c. 10	c. 10
Greenshank	c. 50	c. 50
Bar-tailed godwit <u>Limosa lapponica</u>	c. 10	c. 10
Curlew	c. 10	c. 50
Whimbrel	c. 50	c. 150

Bannerman (1953) gives records of Oyster-catchers from coastal Ghana westwards, but the bird is not included in the checklist of Nigerian birds (Elgood, 1964) and this is apparently the first Nigerian record.

September

Degema Province.

1st

Bonny Sandbank. Waders again counted at same state of tide. Numbers are given above. In addition were seen:

Little stint Erolia minuta, c. 20.

Redshank 1.

2nd.

Similar numbers of waders were counted again, including the single Oyster-catcher.

At low tide practically no waders are left on the sandbank; birds such as Grey Plovers, Sanderlings and Turnstones are then distributed along the shore line. Curlew-sandpipers, Little stints and godwits prefer the mudflats of the Bonny River, and most of the Whimbrels, Common Sandpipers, Curlews and Greenshanks are to be found amongst the mangrove creeks.

October

Area between Bonny and Andoni Rivers.

2nd.

Ringed plovers Charadrius hiaticula recorded for the first

9th: Bonny sandbank; first visit at high tide since 2nd September. Some changes in the wader population were noted:-

Oyster-catcher 5 present.  
 Ringed plover c. 100 present - recent arrivals, as none were recorded in September.  
 Black-tailed godwit Limosa limosa - single bird.  
 (Bannerman gives no coastal records for Nigeria).  
 Bar-tailed godwit Marked increase to c. 100.

Numbers of the other waders recorded on 2nd September were much the same, except that Little Stints were fewer.

Wood sandpipers Tringa glareola were recorded occasionally during the month, over the swamps, always away from the coast.

Knot Calidris canutus first appeared on October 14th along the shore - a party of ten. Thereafter they were regularly recorded, thinly distributed along the shore.

November Andoni River area, Uyo Province.

1st - 20th. Waders were much fewer in number and variety, probably because of the absence of a suitable roost at high tide. Whimbrel, Common Sandpipers and Greenshank were still plentiful in the mangrove, and along the shore a few Sanderling, Grey and Ringed Plovers were recorded. On 17th November a single Oyster-catcher was seen at the mouth of the Andoni River.

24th - 30th.

Coastal area of Ondo-Delta provinces. 10 - 20 km. N.W. of the Benin River, Mid-west Region. This area differs from the rest of the Delta in that the shore is bordered by a belt of swamp-grassland and shallow lagoons, with few trees. This belt, 2 - 3 km. wide, is bordered by a narrow mangrove belt which merges into fresh-water swamp.

During this period, waders were relatively scarce along the muddy shore. Species recorded were as follows:-

Whimbrel	} Common
Grey Plover	
Greenshank	
Common Sandpiper	
} c. 10 birds of each species per km. of shore.	

The last two species also frequented the lagoons.

Knot	} frequent
Curlew sandpiper	
Ringed Plover	
Bar-tailed godwit	
} small parties of up to 10 birds.	

Redshank	} Occasional.
Curlew	

Marsh sandpipers Glottis stagnatilis were common on the edges of lagoons, and on the border of the freshwater swamp. Wood sandpipers - probably the most numerous wader in the area at this time - were regularly recorded, including flocks of up to 20.

Green sandpipers Tringa ochropus were recorded occasionally over the lagoons.

December Same area.

As for November, with addition of two Little Ringed Plovers Charadrius dubius on the 21st in the lagoon area..

1964.

January Same area.

As a result of the partial drying-up of the lagoons, waders became more plentiful. Curlew-Sandpipers were recorded in flocks of c. 100, and all the waders listed above occurred in the lagoon area, with the exception of Knot and Bar-tailed Godwits. Little Stints were recorded in this area for the first time on January 17th, when two Little Ringed Plovers were also recorded.

Single Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* recorded in the lagoon area. Apart from this addition, the wader population showed little change from January, except that no Green Sandpipers were recorded.

During the three months spent in this coastal area, no Turnstones or Sanderlings were recorded.

### March

1st - 14th.

Aba area, E. Region: No records.

15th - 31st.

Andoni River area, Uyo Province - mangrove swamp and tidal mudflats.

Waders were recorded as follows:-

Whimbrel - very common.

Grey Plover, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Curlew-Sandpiper - all common. Wood Sandpiper, Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew - occasional.

These records were mainly of birds seen in the evenings, heading coastwards to roost.

### April Same area.

1st - 11th.

No Grey Plovers or Bar-tailed Godwits recorded, but Curlew-Sandpipers more numerous - a flock of c. 50 recorded on the mudflats. Redshanks also more numerous - a flock of 6 recorded, besides frequent single birds. Ringed Plovers were recorded in small flocks, also Little Stints. Whimbrel, Greenshank and Common Sandpipers were still common but in reduced numbers. Single Curlews were recorded occasionally, and a Wood Sandpiper once, on April 7th.

Along the sandy shore East of the Andoni River, only Sanderlings were recorded, in small numbers.

12th - 25th.

Aba district. No records.

### May - June ON LEAVE

### July

2nd - 11th.

Ahoada, Port-Harcourt Province. No records.

12th - 15th.

Port Harcourt - Bonny River and offshore.

The only records were:-

1 Common Sandpiper, Port Harcourt harbour - 12th July.

1 Greenshank, Port Harcourt harbour - 15th July.

16th - 31st.

Aba - Oron. No records.

### August

Oron area, Uyo Province, away from the Cross River.

No records.

### September

Oron area, including Cross River.

A few Common Sandpipers and Whimbrel recorded, also a single Curlew. Lack of records due to few opportunities for watching, (I was based on land at the time, instead of on a house-boat.), rather than to an absence of waders. The lower reaches of the Cross, where mudflats occur, doubtless had a fair wader population at the time.

### October

1st - 12th Same area.

7th. On mudflats in the Cross River. 3 Redshanks, 1 Grey Plover and 1 Greenshank.

13th - 31st.

Forcados River area, Delta Province.

Mainly mangrove swamp.

Common Sandpipers and Whimbrels common. No other waders recorded.

November

Area between the Forcados and Warri Rivers, Delta Province.

Common Sandpipers common; Whimbrel fewer. One record of a single Greenshank.

The lack of waders in this area is probably due to the absence of suitable feeding grounds such as those nearer to, and along the shore.

December

1st - 23rd. Warri River area.

As for November, but with occasional records of Green-shank.

24th. Green Sandpiper at Onitsha, and two at Aba.

31st. Wood Sandpiper at Umukoroshe.

1965.January

Delta Province.

1st - 12th.

Warri River.

No change from December.

14th. Single Green Sandpiper over Forcados River.

26th. Escravos River area.

Waders much more plentiful compared with the Warri River area. Whimbrel very common. On sandbanks near the river mouth, a few Grey Plovers, Common Sandpipers, Greenshanks and Bar-tailed Godwits recorded.

Along the shore, Sanderling and Grey Plovers common.

30th. c. 1,500 Whimbrel recorded flying up the Escravos River at early morning, in flocks of up to 100. Whimbrel appear to be more numerous here than in any other part of the Delta that I have visited.

February

Delta Province.

2nd. Shore - South of Escravos River.

Along a one mile stretch the following were recorded:-

Grey Plover	c. 10	Ringed Plover	c. 10
Curlew-Sandpiper	c. 5	Little Stint	c. 5
Common Sandpiper	c. 10	Marsh Sandpiper	c. 30
Greenshank	c. 25	Bar-tailed godwit	c. 10
Whimbrel	c. 10		

3rd. As above, with the addition of:-

Sanderling	c. 20	Turnstone	c. 5.
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7th - 28th.

Uyo area.

A few common Sandpipers in freshwater swamp near the Cross River. Single Green sandpiper on 25th.

March Uyo - Ikot Ekpene area. Mainly dry bush and cultivated land.

No records from this area.

7th, Eket beach.

1 Whimbrel and a few common sandpipers only.

April - May Uyo - Ikot Ekpene - Bende area.

No records.

June Okigwe area, Owerri Province.

It is difficult to summarise these scattered observations but I will attempt a rough overall picture of the changing pattern of the wader population in the Delta.

Most of the waders are found near the mouths of large rivers such as the Bonny and the Escravos, where sandbanks provide roosting places near feeding grounds - mudflats and the shore. Over much of the Delta, which is mainly

mangrove swamp, only Common Sandpipers, Whimbrel and Greenshank are common. Few of the other waders are recorded. In many parts, where dense mangrove or swamp-forest is predominant, no waders are found.

At the beginning of July, Common Sandpipers are found in some areas, and during the month the first Greenshank and Curlew arrive. By the end of August most of the waders have arrived, although numbers appear to increase during September and October. Ringed plover and Knot are late arrivals apparently, not being recorded before October.

Just how long the waders remain in the Delta I can only guess, as I have not yet been near the coast during May and June. It appears that some, such as Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Turnstone, depart during March, but others - Whimbrel, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Curlew-Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ringed Plover and Sanderling, are still common in mid-April, though in reduced numbers. Probably some of these remain another month, and Common Sandpipers may be present throughout the year. The records of Oystercatcher, a new Nigerian bird, reflect the absence of observers in the largely inaccessible Delta.

#### References.

- Bannerman, J. A. (1953) The Birds of West and Equatorial Africa - Edinburgh.  
 Elgood, J. H. (1964). Provisional Check-list of the birds of Nigeria.  
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#### THE WEST AFRICAN CROWNED CRANE ON THE JOS PLATEAU, NORTHERN NIGERIA

Lawrence H. Walkinshaw

The West African Crowned Crane (Balearia pavonina pavonina) has been observed in northern Nigeria many times and a few of its nests have been found (Bannerman, 1931, 1951). More recently V.W. Smith (1961, 1964) found several nests near Vom. In correspondence with Smith, he suggested that I study the species on the Jos Plateau, Plateau Province, and that I make their home my headquarters. This I did, and thanks to them and the many people associated with the Federal Department of Veterinary Medicine, I was able to make the following studies.

Auto trips were made with the V.W. Smiths to Dukuru, Jos, Sabon Gida, Kato, Kafo, MoKafo, Kassa and Ropp. C. H. Fry took me to the South end of the Plateau in a land rover one day and I made a trip with a milk lorry to Tenti dam and Bokkos on another day. In addition, I walked many times to Sacred Grove, Kato, Kafo, Sabon Gida, Miango and a nearby sugar cane patch.

#### DISTRIBUTION

The West African Crowned Crane is rare at Zaria (Fry, 1965), but abundant on the lower Kaduna River and the Niger. Yet only one was reported by Skillster (1963) at Kaduna. Greatest abundance on the plateau appears to be near Vom. Fewer numbers occur at Jos, South to Kurra Falls, Tenti dam, Bokkos, and Mbar. Further east the species has been reported (congregations up to 600) near Lake