



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



**Join the WAOS and support
the future availability of free
pdfs on this website.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm>

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.

If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

**Devenez membre de la
SOOA et soutenez la
disponibilité future des pdfs
gratuits sur ce site.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm>

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.
Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante
(2) pour économiser du papier.

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.
 Bull. Ornithol. Soc. 1 : 13-25.

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

Chad (A.J. Hopson, pers. comm.), in Bornu (Bannerman), and very abundant in Cameroun (V.W. Smith, C.H. Fry, and D. Godfrey, pers. comm.).

My study took place between 23rd July and 18th August 1965. I observed a total of 64 different wild cranes, plus several in semi-captivity; During the 27 days, a total of 226 field-hours, I observed a total of 196 Crowned Cranes, which of course included some duplications from one day to another but up to 40 cranes were seen in a single day. We went by car about 550 miles and I walked an estimated 108 miles. Seven, possibly eight, nests were found. Most of the observations were made within seven miles, chiefly northwest of Vom.

PRENESTING BEHAVIOUR

When I arrived many of the Crowned Cranes were in small flocks (4 to 28 individuals) but some were already separated onto their territories in pairs. These were scattered about two miles apart except for three pairs located on a particularly good prairie beyond Kafé in one square mile. The last week I was in the field, I saw only one non-breeding flock (six on 17th August). At this time all other birds were in pairs. All pairs were feeding chiefly on grass seeds on the open prairies, the birds roaming together only a few feet apart. In non-farming areas they roosted at night in some remote tree, flying to the extreme top at dusk.

As nesting time approached, each pair was observed dancing, some on many occasions. The larger bird or male was most often the instigator and the most demonstrative. After dancing several minutes around his mate she often entered into the dance. I did not observe nearly as much head bobbing with this species as I did in 1961 and 1962 with the South African Crowned Crane (Balearica regulorum regulorum).

I observed copulation twice. The procedure was similar to other cranes. The female crouched with wings slightly spread, her head and neck held forward in a straight line. The male with slowly beating wings mounted her for only a few seconds. Following this they both fed side by side. Copulation occurred by one pair at 1300 hours on 2nd August, 12 days prior to the laying of their first egg, and by the second pair on 8th August, at 0716 hours, three days after their first nest had been destroyed, about 12 days prior to laying in their next nest.

NESTING BEHAVIOUR

When the cranes first began nest building, they trampled down the vegetation by foot at the site. Then they began scratching grass and other vegetation toward the nest. They also carried some materials with their bills, most often the greener vegetation near the nest. Usually they worked only a few meters from the nest. However, sometimes they worked on several sites and sometimes as much as two weeks prior to egg-laying. Finally, one definite site was selected and here they worked from 30 to 60 minutes a day, usually during mid-morning. Two first nests required 10 and 12 days for completion yet a second nest was built in one day after the first egg of a set was taken by a predator from their first nest. Some cranes changed sites when human activities increased too much to their preferred site. In three cases these second sites were moved two, two, and one-half miles.

Crowned Cranes usually fed some distance from the nest site. A few days prior to egg-laying, the female often left the male on the feeding territory and flew to the new nest site alone. She called a sad 'Ka-wonk' as she flew to the location. Arriving at the nest, she stood, looked around or walked around in its vicinity but often did no work on it. In 15 to 30 minutes she suddenly returned to her mate.

Incubation began fairly steadily the day the first egg was laid, both birds participating. By the day the third egg was laid, incubation was in full progress, both birds taking their regular turn. With all of my observations I note the smaller bird, definitely the female, incubating at night. During two all day watches, the birds changed places six and ten times at one nest. The first day of these, there were two interruptions by cattle herds watering too close to the nest site. The second day there were no interruptions.

The first day, 12th August, two days after the third egg was laid, the female incubated 330 daylight minutes (all night to 0729; 0925-1014; 1127-1157; 1300-1412; 1715-on all night). The male was on the nest, 260 minutes (0729-0803; 1014-1127; 1412-1645). Three periods, the first by their own volition, were spent away from the nest, 0803-0925; 1157-1300; and 1645-1715, totalling 175 minutes. Thus between 0600 and 1845 hours, daylight to dark, the eggs, were attended to by both parents for 77.1% of the time (male, 35.3%). The female was on the nest the night of 12-13th August from 1715, 12th August until 0630, 13th August. At the same nest, 13th August, 0600 to 1845 hours, the female was on the nest 376 minutes (up to 0630; 0731-0915; 1057-1158; 1217-1402; 1445-1536; and 1820 on all night), for 49.15% of daylight time; the male was there for 362 minutes (0630-0731; 0915-1030; 1158-1217; 1402-1445; and 1536-1820) for 47.5% of daylight time. Both birds were away from the nest for 27 minutes (1030-1057). Thus both birds attended the eggs a total of 96.4% of the time. However, the female was standing, etc. over the eggs for 73 minutes; the male, 42 minutes without incubating, during the day. Consequently, the eggs were incubated only 81.4% of daylight time.

The first daylight changes on four mornings occurred at 0636, 0637, 0729, and 0630. Last changes occurred at 1715 and 1820 hours. One night a male roosted in an oil palm only 300 feet from the nest from which he departed at 0636; another night he roosted in the marsh near the nest; and still a third night he flew in the cloudy dusk at 1830, a distance of at least three miles, up onto a rocky slope. Just prior to landing we could hear him calling. When he disappeared we were unable to tell whether he roosted on top of a small tree or on top of one of the rocks. At another nest at 1854 on 15th August, we watched the male fly at dusk one-half mile to the top of a leafless 20 foot tree, where in the dark he was silhouetted against the sky as we left. He and his mate had both been feeding away from the nest (two of three eggs in nest). She flew to the nest and began incubating for the night at 1842. V. W. Smith saw this pair go to roost in the same tree at dusk 21st August after something had destroyed their eggs.

THE EGGS

During 1965 eggs were laid in five nests as follows:
Nest 1: 30th July (Destroyed by Pied Crows Corus albus when people worked in a

•ocoyam patch all day 120 feet and less from the nest).

Nest 2: 2nd, 4th August (Possibly the same pair as at Nest 1. They deserted the nest because people worked all day 5th August sometimes only 45 feet from nest). Nest 3: 6, 8, 10th August (All eggs were pipped the morning of 6th September, Mrs. V.W. Smith). These eggs must have hatched 6th and 7th September, either 27 or 28 days after the last egg was laid. Nest 4: 13, 14, and 16th August (Destroyed by some unknown agency, 20th August.). Nest 7: contained two eggs on 17th August. Two other nest had full sets of three eggs on 16th and 17th August while another nest was completed without eggs on 17th August.

During some years eggs have been laid much earlier than during 1965: 5th July 1962 (3 eggs); 27th July 1961 (first of three eggs); 10th July 1960 (3 eggs); while some nests were even later, 30th August 1963 (first egg) (Smith, 1961, 1964) and 22nd September (Bannerman, 1951). Smith noted three eggs in one nest on 5th July which hatched on 3rd August, at least 29 days later. At nest 3, above, eggs hatched either 27 or 28 days after laying.

When fresh, eggs were unspotted, white with a light pinkish or bluish tinge. By the second day they were somewhat stained. When a week old they were badly stained, showing no signs of either blue or pink. Fifteen eggs when fresh (not more than two days old) averaged 140.1 (122.0-168.1) grams in weight while Mrs. Smith weighted three at hatching time which averaged 115.3 grams. Twenty-one eggs averaged in measurements, 80.1 (76.3-86.8) X 57.9 (55.0-61.4) mm. They are slightly larger than eggs of B.p. ocelliae (Walkinshaw, 1964). I have measured ten eggs of B.p. ocelliae which averaged, 75.26 (70.4-78.4) X 55.24 (52.0-58.8) mm, and three averaged when fresh, in weight, 132.1 (126.6-138.2) grams.

THE NESTS

When nest building began, nests were haphazard piles of grass and/or of the other most convenient vegetation. When completed they were neat piles, depressed two or three inches in the center for the eggs. Seven of eight nests were on dry ground when found but all were positioned such that they could have been flooded or surrounded by water in case of heavy rains. All but one were within eight feet of water; most, only a few inches from it. The one nest was built of rushes amongst rushes and bamboo in water. Other nests were built in: A patch of grass in a field; in grass in the middle of a oocoo-yam patch; in a grass-sedge marsh; in a rice patch; three in patches of atoha.

The average measurements were 88.2 (68.6-109.2) X 105.9 (71.1-139.7) cm across. The one nest in deep water was somewhat flamingo-nest-shaped, narrower at the top. Its base at water level measured 94 X 121.9 cm across and the top, 35.6 x 38 cm. The top was 33 cm above water level. Usually dry land nests were only 2 or 3 cm thick.

DEFENCE OF TERRITORY

I observed Crowned Cranes, both male and female, on several occasions chase other birds away from their territories. Birds driven away were Spur-winged Geese Plectropterus gambensis, White-faced Ducks Dendrocygna viduata, Black-bellied Bustards Lissotis melanogaster and Marsh Owls Asiicapensis. On two occasions I watched a pair of Crowned Cranes land only a short distance from a neighboring nest. Both times all four birds (the birds of each pair close together) approached each other by foot and with their backs necks and heads arched in a curved arc (defense pose) came to within a few meters of each other. Here they stopped. On neither occasion did they battle. Only two to three meters from each other they held their aggressive stance for 10 to 15 minutes. Then they began preening then feeding and slowly they widened the distance between themselves. This place was only 65 meters from one nest and 320 meters from the other. Although all four birds were very alert they did not even feign attack so there was no bodily contact.

Usually cranes fed about one to two km from the nest, but at times as close as 100 meters. When flying they seldom flew higher than 150 meters above ground except on two occasions when flying to roost in the evening, they were observed flying much higher. During slow deliberate flight I timed their flight at 120 wing beats per minute and in normal flight about 150 wing beats.

REFERENCES CITED

- Bannerman, D.A. (1931, 1951) The Birds of Tropical West Africa. London. Vol. 2 (1931); Vol. 8 (1951).
- Fry, C.H. (1965) The birds of Zaria. III - Residents, vagrants and checklist (non-passerines). Bull. Nig. Ornithol. Soc. 2 No. 7 68-79.
- Skilleter, M. (1963) Some notes on Kaduna birds. Nig. Field. 28 : 34-42.
- Smith, V.W. (1962) Some birds which breed near Vom, Northern Nigeria. Nig. Field 27 : 4-34.
- Smith, V.W. (1964) Further notes on birds breeding near Vom, Northern Nigeria. Pt. 1. Nig. Field 29 : 100-117.
- Walkinshaw, L.H. (1964) The African Crowned Crane. Wilson Bull. 76 : 355-377.

MIGRANT SCOPS OWLS DTVS SCOPS AT IBADAN

D. R. Wells*

The Palaearctic Scops Owl Otus scops was first recorded at Ibadan on 29th February, 1956 by Elgood (1959). Between 1959 and 1963 he recorded "several" more, all within the period December - February (Elgood & Sibley, 1964). During the past two winters the author has examined five of these owls at Ibadan, one in 1965 and four in 1966, all between early January and mid March.

It now seems likely that Otus scops regularly winters at least as far south as the forest edge in Nigeria, contrary to Bannerman's (1963) estimate that in West Africa it does not penetrate far beyond the desert fringe. An apparently increasing frequency of occurrence in Ibadan may well reflect progressive removal of the forest in the area (vide Elgood & Sibley, 1964).