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FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS.

APRIL TO OCTOBER, 1968

J. B. Heigham.

This year produced a sensational rainy season and Victoria Island was much wetter and had more standing pools and vegetation than during the same period in 1967 so that a number of differences in the bird population were noted. The chief of these was the continual presence of numbers of Palearctic waders, principally Whimbrels Numenius phaeopus, which were present throughout the period but whose numbers vastly increased during June (when they could be heard until as late as 10 o'clock at night calling as they flew over my flat) and went on increasing until it was estimated, through August and September, that about 1,000 were coming every night from east and west, but principally east, to roost round the stagnant pools in the middle of the sandflats. These numbers decreased in October and on the 28th October only one was seen on the Island. Greenshank Glottis nebularius, Redshank Tringa totanus and Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula were more numerous than at this period in 1967 and Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola appeared up to 30 strong in August (not observed in 1967). Only pairs of Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus and up to nine Marsh Sandpipers Tringa stagnatilis were observed during the period. A curious feature was the absence of Common Sandpipers Actitis hypoleucos between 1st May and 14th July, as they were numerous and ubiquitous both before and after these dates.

Other points relating to birds previously recorded which are worthy of note are as follows:-

African Black Kite Milvus migrans: The first African Black Kite of the new season was seen on 20th September.

Painted Snipe Rostratula benghalensis: A male and female were first observed in the same drainage ditch on 28th May (1967, 12th July); four chicks were seen with the adult male on 30th June (1967, 30th July) and three of them were able to fly short distances by 15th July. No more than three were seen thereafter and the last positive sighting was of a fully grown bird on 2nd September (1967, 28th August).

Kittlitz's Sandplover Leucopoliis pecuarius: Appears to have stayed longer this year (not seen after mid-September, 1967) because of the longer standing rain-pools and was still plentiful in mid-October.

Temminck's Courser Cursorius temminckii: Was more plentiful and widespread this year, being seen from 23rd May to mid-October. The largest number seen was 21 on 29th June (seen only in June, 1967, largest number 4).

Grey Pratincole Galachrysis cinerea: Was first seen this year on 6th July (1967, 23rd July) and only about 100 were seen on the Island by mid-October.

Senegal Coucal Centropus senegalensis: Was present throughout, together with the Rufous-bellied variety, but on 26th August two C. senegalensis were observed beside Kuramo Waters which appeared to be intermediate, both having rather dirty looking off-white throats and breasts and one having distinct chestnut tinge on the throat.

Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis: Were more numerous, up to three being seen frequently (1967, only one pair seen in June).

Blue-headed Wagtail Budytes flavus: The last bird in bright yellow plumage was seen on 22nd April, 1968, and the first of the new season on 30th September, 1968.

European Swallow Hirundo rustica: Was first seen in considerable numbers flying across Lagos Harbour on 21st September.

The following species additional to those recorded for the period June, 1967, to February, 1968 (Heigham, 1968) have been observed in the period under review:-

Great White Heron Casmerodius albus: One bird seen on 1st September in marshes behind Igbosere village. Two also seen in August in the same area by Mr. & Mrs. A. H. Fitzerbert.

White-faced Tree Duck Dendrocygna viduata: One bird first seen by Kuramo Channel on 18th June, thereafter up to five birds were frequently seen flying around the Island and roosting by rainpools behind Apese village whence they were frequently disturbed by passer-by. Longest number seen, eight on 3rd October.

Tawny Eagle Aquila rapax: Two birds were seen on 1st September wheeling and playing over Igbosere and the marshes, where they disturbed a large number of Whimbrels but did not apparently trouble the Great White Heron noted above which remained perched in a tall tree on the edge of the marshes throughout their performance. The light was dull and the upper parts of these birds appeared earth brown with dark brown or black ends to the primaries and secondaries; the under parts could not be clearly discerned but appeared dark. In another of these birds (one of this pair?) seen two days later at Ikoyi Park in brighter light, the upper parts were the same earth brown but the breast and belly appeared buffish and the underside of the wings light brown, possibly speckled; from the underside seen against the light the tail of this bird appeared barred medium and light brown.

This identification is regarded as probable rather than positive.

Donham's Bustard Neotis denhami: When I first saw this bird on 22nd May in the very grassy area close to the established latrine area used by the inhabitants of Apese I could scarcely believe my eyes so, having for once my notebook with me, I made a detailed field note on the spot. When compared with the description in Bannerman (1953), the size, general markings, particularly the sandy-rufous hind neck, and appearance on the ground and in flight were conclusive. I made frequent visits to the area in the early morning and evening during the next week but did not see the bird again and assumed that it had either flown on its probable northward migration or had been taken for food by the local population. On 16th June, however, my wife and I saw it again in the same area and have seen it three times since, the last sighting on 22nd June. On each occasion we had good views of the bird on the ground, walking around and feeding in relatively short grass, and when approached closely (on two occasions within ca. 40ft. by patient stalking) it flew off and the distinctive pattern of wings and tail were clearly seen from different angles. Only one bird was observed which we take to be a male: it conformed with all the main characteristics recorded by Bannerman (1953) for this species and did not tally with any of the other bustards described but the following points may be of interest:-

- (i) The black cap had a distinct light stripe down the centre from the top of the bill to the nape.
- (ii) The feathers of the upper parts were of a lighter brown than one would expect from the description and the colour plate in Bannerman (1953)
- (iii) The neck appeared longer than in the colour plate and it swayed markedly forward and backward as the bird walked.
- (iv) The underparts were not white as they appear in the colour plate but a rather dull grey/white.

The bird remained silent during our observations, in spite of having been deliberately flushed.

White-fronted Sandplover Leucopoliis marginatus: Constantly present in small numbers, generally on or near the shore.

Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus: Two seen briefly in company with Greenshank in mangrove swamp on 15th October.

Knot Calidris canutus: Nine were seen by Kuramo Channel in company with Whimbrels, Greenshanks, Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers and Common Sandpipers on 21st August. They were mainly in winter dress but two retained vestiges of the rufous breast and belly.

Sanderling Crocethia alba: Seen intermittently in August and September on the shore or close by in parties of up to twelve.

Turnstone Arenaria interpres: One bird in winter dress seen on the shore near Apese village in company with Sanderlings on 14th and 21st September. Three seen in mangrove swamp on 2nd October.

Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola: Four birds were first positively identified on 9th August. Later seen constantly up to 30 strong in all parts of the sandflats and Kuramo Channel.

Curlew Numerius arquatus: One bird seen in company with Whimbrels on 4th September; two others seen apart from Whimbrels on 12th September and one seen alone on 22nd September. These are the only definite sightings of Curlew made by this observer on Victoria Island (or in the Lagos area) since May, 1967. In view of the large numbers of Whimbrels seen at Victoria Island, Lighthouse Beach and Ikoyi Park during the period, it seems to me that Bannerman's impression that the Curlew is the commoner of the two species in Nigeria (around Lagos anyway) ought to be reconsidered. The impression may have gained currency by reason of the fact that these Whimbrels, while constantly emitting their crazy tittering cry, quite often imitate the Curlew's "cour-lee" and bubbling cries.

West African Pratincole Glareola pratincola: Eight birds including adults and juveniles settled briefly on the sand beside Apese (an area frequented by Grey Pratincoles) on the evening of 26th August. On 17th September seven juveniles were seen in the mangrove swamp consorting with a variety of Palaearctic waders.

Common Tern Sterna hirundo: Parties of up to six were seen frequently over Kuramo Waters and along the shore from August to October.

African Button Quail Turnix sylvatica: A pair of these birds was flushed from the tufted grass near Apese twice in the course of stalking Denham's Bustard on 16th June. A pair and single birds have since been similarly flushed in the same general area five or six times, always in the evening.

Red-billed Wood Dove Turtur afer: Pairs and single birds frequently seen at the eastern end of the Island. They invariably make off into the mangrove swamp when disturbed.

Green Fruit Pigeon Vinago australis: A flock of dove-like birds were seen wheeling over the mangrove swamp at the eastern end of the Island on 14th July and on 17th July a flock of about 30 Green Fruit Pigeons settled briefly on a tree beside the wooden causeway leading to Igbosere village but flew away rapidly eastwards when disturbed and were not seen again until 17th September when a flock of the same size circled round the mangrove swamp for about five minutes before disappearing in the same direction.

Black-bellied Coucal Centropus grillii: One bird seen very clearly and deliberately flushed from its bush to establish that there was no confusion with Rufous-bellied Coucal, on 1st September beside Kuramo Water.

Broad-billed Roller Eurystomus afer: One bird seen on 25th April hawking and calling loudly over mangrove swamps at the eastern end of the Island.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon malimbicus: Single birds seen occasionally at mangrove swamp and Kuramo Water.

Grey Hornbill Locophoros nasutus: Pairs and single birds frequently seen in April and May over the marshy area, and perched on Coconut Palms Cocos nucifera near Igbosere village. On 24th June one bird was observed flying eastwards over the residential area at the western end of the Island.

Allied Hornbill Locophoros semifasciatus: One bird only, seen flying over Igbosere village on 17th September.

Quail Finch Ortygospiza atricollis: Small parties of this species (up to 8 strong) were seen frequently throughout the period behaving exactly as described by Bannerman (1953) but they are very difficult to approach and only twice was it possible to observe a party feeding among thick clumps of tall grass. Bannerman records one race O. a. ansorgei as probably ranging to Southern Nigeria; the only points not recorded by Bannerman which were observed in the time and circumstances available were that the black-faced males had orange coloured bills and the others (females? juveniles?) had fawn coloured throats and less brightly coloured bills.

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