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ment for the difficult journey. Future travellers are warned that the short route- going north 51 miles from Maiduguri- is not easy to find even with a guide. We came back via Kukawa which involved 75 miles of sand and 105 of main road and took $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

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A SPOTTED EAGLE OWL'S NEST.

J. R. Lang.

Comparatively little is recorded about the breeding habits of owls in Nigeria, except fro the excellent reports on the Algerian Marsh Owl by Smith & Killick-Kendrick (1964) and Smith(1964).

Concerning the Spotted Eagle Owl Bubo africanus Bannerman (1953) states that the nesting season is March-May in Nigeria; that no nesting materials are used; that the site chosen is either the broken side of a kopje, or a hollow tree, and that two white eggs are laid.

Fry (1965) states that in the Zaria area this owl nests in accessible situations in erosion cliffs, the nestlings being advanced in mid-April; he also believes they may also nest on buildings.

The following is an incomplete account of the nesting efforts of one pair of Spotted Eagle Owls whose nest was found on a rock ledge near the top of a 50 foot cliff bordering a kurmi half a mile S.E. from Vom Hospital. The ledge (and the whole cliff) faces north, and has a sheer rock face on its west side, an overhanging rock behind it, and is only accessible from its east side, where a tuft of dry grass gave added protection. The ledge is about 7 feet from the top of the cliff.

The nest was first found on 4th March 1967 when there were already two clean white eggs on the bare fine earth of the flat rock ledge. An owl was flushed from a "look-out" post (another rock ledge sheltered by a small bush, about 40 feet to the west of the nest on the same rock face) the other owl was flushed from the nest itself, showing that incubation had begun. From the evidence of droppings, it would seem that this was a replacement nest from one situated lower and to the east on the cliff face, which had been destroyed by bush-fire two or three weeks earlier.

The nest was visited on the 5th and 7th March, when both birds were flushed as on the initial visit. On 9th and 11th March, only the sitting bird was seen.

By 16th March the two eggs were still intact and being incubated: on this occasion the "senital" owl was seen roosting on a kopje on the other (north) side of the valley in full view of the nest, but at least 100 yards away. It was never seen again at the first look-out post.

On 19th March both owls were seen close together in a good light. Although neither bird was rufous (Bannerman 1953), there was a distinct difference between them, one being dowdy (with lighter brown parts and fawnish-cream white parts) and the other much more boldly marked with

blacker dark parts and purer white markings. On subsequent visits, it was possible to show that it was always the dowdy owl at the nest (both before and after hatching) and the brighter one acting as decoy from the other side of the valley, or else not seen at all. From this it seems reasonable to assume that the dowdy bird was the female, and the other the male. Close observation of other pairs of nesting eagle owls may reveal this as a constant variation of plumage in breeding birds.

On 23rd March the first substantial rain fell, and the "female" owl was found sitting faithfully on her eggs with her plumage thoroughly soaked. The "male" was sitting under cover of its usual rock on the other side of the valley.

On 24th March the first owlet hatched, it had a pinkish body with a few pure white feather "tufts" about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long. The male was on its usual perch; the female was very anxious, clucking, hooting, and puffing out her buff-white throat and fluttering her eyelids from a rock near the nest.

When the female was flushed from the nest at 17.00 hrs. on 26th March, the second egg was noted to be chipped. By 18.30, when dusk was falling, it had still not broken, and the owl would not leave the nest but stood and hissed and puffed out her body and wings in a most alarming manner. By the next day the second chick had safely hatched.

This gives the minimum incubation period of 24 days, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the incubation period is in fact about four weeks, as in the case of the Algerian Marsh Owl Asio capensis (Smith 1964). It would also suggest that the eggs are laid at two to three day intervals and hatch accordingly.

The male was not seen in the vicinity of the nest after the hatching of the second chick; the female was always with them, and very protective with the display already described.

By 1st April the older chick (9 days) was beginning to get long pins of flight feathers. Both young were now downy all over, and a dirty white in colour. By 6th April (14 days old) the growing body and wing feathers were getting much darker.

On 15th April both chicks were still at the nest, the younger one still "fluffy", the older one's primaries being perhaps a third of full length. Some feathers of a small, unidentifiable bird were on the nest, the only occasion on which any item of diet was noted at or near the nest.

The following day (16th April) the nest was deserted, and remained so on subsequent visits. The chicks were then 24 and 21 days old, and although the older one might have fluttered away (very doubtful) the younger one certainly could not have done so. A predator could have taken them - either human (unlikely in view of the local superstitions about owls) or avian (kites and a shikra had been seen wheeling overhead from time to time); or they could have been removed to a safer place by the parent bird (Smith (1964) noted that young Marsh Owls usually left the nest 2-3 weeks after hatching and were fed nearby for a further 2-3 weeks).

On 2nd and 3rd March 1968 a Spotted Eagle Owl was flushed from the nesting ledge, which at that time was being used as a roost. No nest was found in the vicinity.

In March/April 1969 the ledge was completely deserted and overgrown. Again, no nest was found in the area.

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BIRD NOTES FROM THE CENTRAL CAMEROONS.

R. J. Dowsott.

In June 1968 I spent a week in the central Cameroons, most of the time at the Campment des Cobas, midway between Garoua and N'gaoundero (about 8°N., 13°30'E.). The country is well wooded plateau at about 3,000 to 4,000 feet. The rains had recently started. As published records from this area are few and far between it is worth mentioning the species I observed. Unless stated, records are from Campment des Cobas (within a ten mile radius) and between 14th and 16th June.

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*: One in savanna woodland 12 miles North of Garoua on 16th.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia (Sphenorhynchus) abdimii*: Small numbers breeding south to about 24 miles north of Garoua.

Gabar Goshawk *Melierax (Micornisus) gabar*: One grey phase.

Red-tailed Buzzard *Buteo auguralis*: An adult at Mayo Zadra hills, between Sahuda and Garoua on 11th.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migrans parasitus (tenebrosus)*: One 11 miles north of Garoua on 16th, the only one seen.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: One seen over woodland.

Stone Partridge *Ptilopachus petrosus*: One in rocky woodland.

African Crake *Crex (Crecopsis) agraria*: Quite common in damp drainage areas.

Senegal Bustard *Eupodotis senegalensis*: One and two respectively seen in light woodland 37 miles and 40 miles north of Garoua.

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus (Oedinenus) senegalensis*: One on the Bonno at