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BIRDS IN WAZA NATIONAL PARK , CAMEROUN

C. H. Fry

It will be many years before West Africa emerges from the descriptive phase of its ornithology, and no excuse is offered for presenting readers of the BULLETIN with yet another faunal list. Nor is any apology needed for discussing an area lying so close outside Nigeria's boundary.

I was enabled to visit Waza National Park for three days in late November 1969, as an appointee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and of the World Wildlife Fund, accompanying the Trans-African Hovercraft Expedition. I have been so bold as to place these three days' observations on record because I have not been able to find any reference to the avifauna of the Park in the literature apart from the occurrences of a few species there mentioned in Good, Birds of Cameroun, 1958, and a list of the more spectacular species of Waza in a tourist brochure. From my few observations it is clearly an area of exceptional ornithological interest, and is an important wintering ground for certain Palaearctic species.

Waza National Park lies in Northern Cameroun on the co-ordinates 11° 20' N, 14° 40' E, and is 172,000 hectares (664 square miles) in extent. Except for the inselberg on which the Waza camp itself is situated, and one or two other inselbergs, the whole area is flat, and its eastern half is inundated in the wet season, becoming penetrable only about March. The western part is well wooded but not uniform in the composition of the woodland; there are large areas of almost pure stands of Acacia spp. frequented by Giraffes Giraffa camelopardalis, and elsewhere occurs a mixed woodland of Mitragyna, Anogeisus, Ziziphus and Balanites and other tree species more characteristic of Sudan than Guinea savanna. In November there are a number of "mares" - waterholes and small marshes, but these gradually dry out during the dry season and there is a resultant shift of game to the moister eastern part of the reserve. Kobs Adenota kob are usually the commonest antelope, and were estimated in 1964 to number 80,000; other common mammals are Waterbuck Kobus defassa, Roan Hippotragus equinus, Senegal Hartebeeste Damaliscus korrigum, Red-fronted Gazelle Gazella rufifrons, Wart-hog Phacochoerus aethiopicus and Elephant Loxodonta africana.

Bordering the Park to the north-west is an extensive marsh of wild rice Oryza laterrima, with a zone of the shrub Sesbania sp. at its edge and a surrounding belt of Desert Dates Balanites aegyptiaca on drier soil. It probably exceeds 10,000 hectares (40 square miles) in area. So far as I could determine during my brief visit, the distribution of most birds in the Park proper was

rather uniform, while many of the aquatic species inhabiting the marsh outside the north-west boundary also occurred at the marshy waterholes inside the Park. The flooded "yaérés" (wetland) in the eastern part of the reserve were not visited, and elsewhere coverage was equally by Land-Rover and (since there is no restriction) on foot. There follows an inventory of the bird species seen, with an indication of abundance.

<u>Ostrich</u>				
Struthio camelus *	1,1		Accipiter badius	1
<u>Grebe</u>			Melierax metabates	1,1
Podiceps ruficollis	1		M. gabar	1,1,1 and 1 black phase
<u>Hérons</u>			Butastur rufipennis	f
Ardea melanocephala	100's on marsh		Buteo rufinus subsp. <u>or</u> B. buteo	
A. purpurea	1		vulpinus	1,1,1,1
Egretta alba	1		Hieraaetus spilogaster	1
E. intermedia	1		Aquila rapax	f
Ardeola ibis	numerous on marsh		Milvus migrans	abundant
A. ralloides	1,1		Haliaeetus vocifer	2
Butorides striatus	1		Elanus caeruleus	1,1
<u>Hammerkop</u>			Falco biarmicus	1,1
Scopus umbretta	1		F. tinnunculus	f
<u>Storks</u>			Lophoetus occipitalis	f
Ciconia ciconia	4,4,12+		<u>Game-birds</u>	
C. episcopus	frequent at fires and elsewhere		Francolinus clappertoni	1,1
Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis	1		Numida meleagris	common
Leptoptilos crumeniferus	frequent at fires		<u>Rails</u>	
<u>Ibises</u>			Gallinula chloropus	1
Threskiornis aethiopica	10+		<u>Crane</u>	
Bostrychia hagedash	2		Balearica pavonina	common
<u>Duck</u>			<u>Bustards</u>	
Anas crecca	15		Otms arabs	1,1,2
A. querquedula	2		Neotis denhami	1,1,2,1
Dendrocygna viduata	5		Eupodotis senegalensis	1
Sarkidiornis melanota	5,10		<u>Lily-trotter</u>	
Plectropterus gambensis	5		Actophilornis africana	10
<u>Vultures</u>			<u>Painted Snipe</u>	
Gyps ruppellii	f**		Rostratula benghalensis	1
Gyps bengalensis	local		<u>Plovers</u>	
Aegyptius tracheliotus	1		Vanellus tectus	2,2
Trigonoceps occipitalis	pair nesting		V. senegallus	10
Neophron monachus	scarce		V. spinosus	3
<u>Hawks</u>			Charadrius dubius	1
Circus macrourus	1		Himantopus himantopus	12
C. aeruginosus	1		<u>Sandpipers</u>	
Terathopus ecaudatus	f		Philomachus pugnax	12
Circaetus gallicus	1,1,1		Tringa hypoleucos	1
C. beaudouini (?)	1,1		T. ochropus	1
			T. glareola	1
			T. erythropus	1,6,12
			T. nebularia	3

\*Names follow White (1965). \*\*f = frequent.

<u>Pigeons</u>		<u>Lark</u>	
Columba guinea	1	Eremopteryx leucotis	common
Streptopelia turtur	very common	<u>Wagtails</u>	
S. decipiens	f	Motacilla flava	common
S. vinacea	common	M. alba alba	1
S. senegalensis	f	<u>Babbler</u>	
S. roseogrisea	local	Turdoides plebejus	3
Oena capensis	local	<u>Flycatcher</u>	
Turtur abyssinicus	f	Terpsiphone viridis	2
<u>Owl</u>		<u>Chats</u>	
Bubo africanus	1	Oenanthe bottae	1,1
<u>Plantain-eaters</u>		O. oenanthe	f
Crinifer piscator	1	Phoenicurus phoenicurus	1,1,1
<u>Coucal</u>		Cercotrichas podobe	1++
Centropus monachus	1,1	<u>Warblers</u>	
<u>Coly</u>		Sylvia communis	1
Colius macrourus	1,4	S. curruca	1
<u>Nightjars</u>		S. cantillans	local
Macrodipteryx longipennis	1	Hippolais pallida (not laeneni)	1
Caprimulgus climacurus	3+	Acrocephalus arundinaceus	3+
<u>Swifts</u>		A. schoenobaenus	f
Apus affinis	5	Locustella luscinioides	2
Cypsiurus parvus	local	Phylloscopus trochilus	f
<u>Roller</u>		Apalis sp. (see below)	3
Coracias abyssinica	common	Sylvietta brachyura	1,1,1
<u>Hoopoes</u>		Eremomela pusilla	3
Upupa epops subsp.	f	Camaroptera brachyura	f
Phoeniculus purpureus	f	Cisticola ?cantans	1
(1 feeding fledgling)		C. galactotes	2
P. aterrimus	1,1,1	Prinia subflava	f
<u>Kingfishers</u>		<u>Swallows</u>	
Alcedo cristata	1	Hirundo rustica	2+
Halcyon senegalensis	1,1,2	H. aethiopia	f
H. leucocephala	common	Riparia riparia	100 at bush fire
<u>Bee-eaters</u>		<u>Drongo</u>	
Merops orientalis	local	Dicrurus adsimilis	1,1,2,1
M. superciliosus persicus		<u>Shrikes</u>	
40 migrating northeast		Lanius nubicus	1
M. nubicus	common	L. excubitorius	2
M. pusillus	9	L. senator	1,1
<u>Hornbills</u>		Laniarius barbarus subsp.	1
Tockus nasutus	f	Nilaus afer	f
T. erythrorhynchus	common	<u>Crow</u>	
Bucorvus abyssinicus	3,1	Corvus albus	local
<u>Barbets</u>		<u>Starlings</u>	
Lybius vieilloti	f	Lamprolanius chalybaeus	f
Pogoniulus chrysoconus	f	L. caudatus	common
<u>Honeyguide</u>		Buphagus africanus	f
Indicator indicator	1	<u>Sunbirds</u>	
<u>Woodpeckers</u>		Nectarinia pulchella	1,1
Campethera punctuligera	1	Anthreptes platura	1
Dendropicos elachus	1	Nectarinia senegalensis	1
Mesopicos goertae	1		

<u>Sparrows</u>		<u>Estrildines</u>	
Passer griseus	1	Amadina fasciata	locally f
Petronia dentata	common	Estrilda troglodytes	1
<u>Weavers</u>		E. bengala	f
Ploceus luteolus	f	Lagonosticta senegala	1,2
P. vitellinus	f	Lonchura malabarica	2
P. ?capitalis	2	Vidua macroura	1
P. cucullatus	f	V. (Hypochoera) sp.	f
Quelea quelea	common	V. orientalis	f
Euplectes orix	f		
Bubalornis albirostris	5		
Plocepasser superciliosus	2		
Sporopipes frontalis	1,1		
<u>Finch</u>			
Serinus leucopygia	common		

Attention may be drawn to certain of these records. European Turtle-Doves Streptopelia turtur were extremely numerous, and wide spread in all parts of the park and on the rice marsh. I feel an estimate of 100 birds per square mile to be conservative, so that there may have been well in excess of 60,000 within the park. They are much more abundant here than in the well-known wintering areas of the species near Hadejia and Abadam, and it seems possible that a major segment of the western Palaearctic population winters in northern Cameroun.

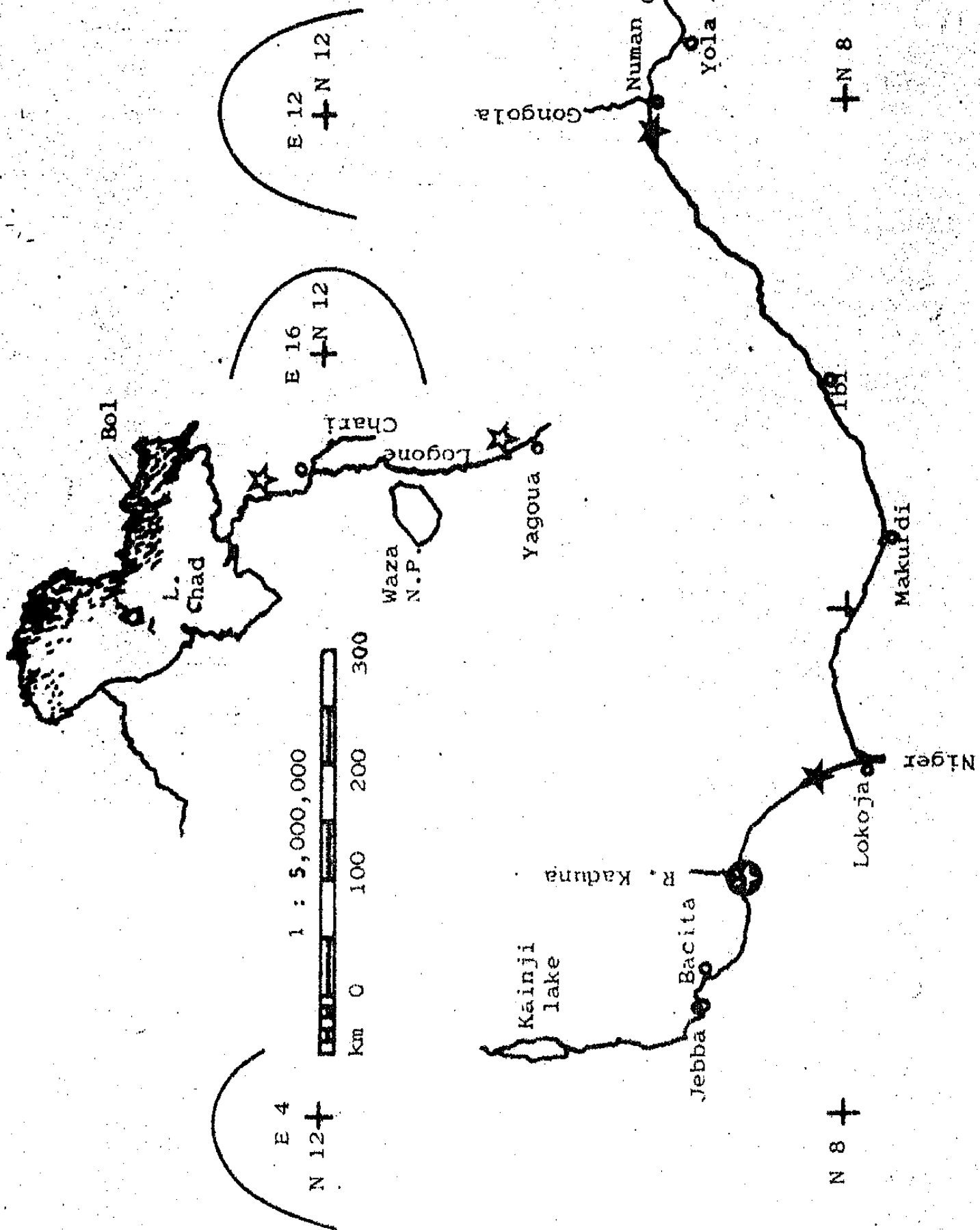
Total numbers of White Storks Ciconia ciconia were impossible to assess; up to 12 were seen together at a bush fire, and several others noted here and there in the reserve. In view of their diminution on their breeding grounds and their scarcity in West Africa, the presence of this population in the security of a National Park is gratifying.

Masked Shrikes Lanius nubicus are rare as far south-west as this (Elgood, Sharland & Ward, Ibis 108 :84), and Grey-backed Fiscal Shrikes L. excubitorius, which occur in north-east Bornu (Fry, Bull. Niger. Orn. Soc. 2 (7): 83 ), are here near their western boundary.

The two Savi's Warblers Locustella luscinioides double the number of Chad Basin records and extend the wintering range 2° further south. They were not netted, but were well seen, with Sedge Warblers Acrocephalus schoenobaenus and Great Reed Warblers A. arundinaceus affording direct comparison, in Sesbania thickets at the edge of the rice marsh. Characteristic of the genus, the tail was broad proximally and distally; the lack of any streaks on back or breast precluded species other than luscinioides. All plumage details agreed with the birds I have netted at Malamfatori, Lake Chad, in 1967 and 1968, and I can confidently discount as alternative identifications the following unstreaked arundinicolous warblers of which I have field experience: A. arundinaceus, the A. scirpaceus group (baeticatus, dumetorum, palustris), Cettia cetti, and Acrocephalus (Calamoecetor) rufescens and gracilirostris.

Hawks were present in great abundance and variety, but a number of other birds were conspicuous by their absence, or paucity. No Grey Herons Ardea cinerea were seen, nor Common Bulbuls Pycnonotus barbatus, and cisticolas were scarce. Despite the good grass cover, small graminivores were uncommon (buntings, sparrows, finches, weavers, estrildines), and there was also a dearth of berry-eating birds like Whitethroats Sylvia communis, largely accounted for, no doubt, from the fact that only a few berry and small-fruit bearing plants were in fruit at the time (Loranthus, Teretia, Cissus quadrangularis). Neither the saltbush Salvadora persica nor the exotic Lantana, which are such an important source of berries for soft-bills elsewhere in West Africa, were noted in the reserve.

Three warblers were seen whose identity remains a mystery. They were an adult accompanied by two fledglings, and gave very good views as they moved about eye level through thin Balanites trees at the border of the rice marsh. The adult was actively catching small insects - not by 'flycatching' but by searching foliage and branches - to feed to the fledglings, and all three birds often gave a thin sibilant contact call. They were the size and shape of an Apalis species. The entire upperparts were rather dark grey, much darker or dull black on the exposed upperside of the folded tail, and shading imperceptibly on the head to creamy white on chin and throat. The rest of the underparts were creamy white in the adult, and with a faint buffish wash in the juveniles. The outermost tail feather(s) was/were white. The bill had the proportions of the beak of Prinia subflava or was rather thinner, and was horn-coloured, with yellowish gape. Feet and legs were flesh, and the iris very dark brown (once or twice it seemed to reflect red). The only savanna apalis in this part of the world is A. caniceps, but neither this nor any other described Apalis fits the description. The only other candidate is the 'tit-flycatcher' Parisoma plumbeum, but I believe that Bannerman (1953) and Praed & Grant (1960) are quite correct in asserting that the beak of this species is black with the lower mandible bluish, and the legs and feet plumbeous. Furthermore, on every one of my dozen or so encounters with P. plumbeum, I have been impressed how the tail is cocked and moved jerkily in a wide arc from side to side, and there was no suggestion of the waza birds doing this.



*V. albiceps*

★ Northern limit of *V. albiceps*   ★ Southern limit of *V. spinosus*   ★ Vagrant Occurrences of