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THE BIRDS OF THE MOLE GAME RESERVE

Part 1. Non-passerines.

by

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1967 Mr. E.O.A. Asibey, head of the Ghana Game and Wildlife Department, suggested to the Oxford Ornithological Society that useful work could be carried out in the Mole Game Reserve. By February 1968 five students interested in doing this had formed an expedition under the auspices of the Oxford University Exploration Club, with whose help equipment and funds were raised.

The aims of the expedition were to provide information on the avifauna of the Reserve, to make a small collection of skins and photographs, and to train four local game wardens in the basic principles of field ornithology.

This paper attempts to indicate some of the main ornithological features of the Reserve and is based on the work of the expedition.

THE RESERVE

Mole Game Reserve covers 900 sq. miles of the Orchard Bush country in northern Ghana between $9^{\circ}30'N$ and $10^{\circ}30'N$ and around $1^{\circ}W$. The soils are thin, dry and lateritic, particularly in the east, and the rivers which are seasonal, drain eastwards from the granite plateau in the west to the Volta. Apart from a few limited scarps in the south most of the terrain is rolling with the impressive Konkori scarp rising further north in an area we were unable to visit.

The Reserve, due to the incidence of disease, the poor soils and the seasonal rainfall, has long repelled settlement. A few groups of hunters were moved to peripheral villages in the early 1950's when the Reserve was created by the British. Now the only population is that of the Reserve staff living in small strategically placed villages linked by inadequate dirt roads. The main village of this type is Samole, near which the motel has been built and where we had our base camp.

MAIN HABITATS

Although not qualified ecologists, we attempted to identify a few basic habitat types which we worked intensively. The most widespread habitat we called "Dry Orchard Bush" and this covered some 85%-95% of the area. This consists of almost closed canopy with small trees 20'-30' in height and a number of types including several acacias. The ground cover is mainly long coarse grass with a few smaller shrubs. In places

the monotony of this Orchard Bush is relieved by open areas of grass and bare lateritic surfaces.

Taller trees, often in small groups, or associated with wetter areas or well drained slopes. Most of the river courses are bordered by a narrow strip of taller, forest trees. This we called "Riverine Forest". We worked the best example of this near Lovi camp where we found a number of forest species. A second forest type is "Dry Forest" where there is no visible water. This appeared to be associated with old village sites and often contained numerous fruit trees, palms and other evidence of cultivation now abandoned. Both types of forest are characterised by thick undergrowth of long grass, creepers and shrubs which made movement through them very difficult.

Near some of the river courses are often areas of seasonal marsh or "fadama". In places these extend into the Dry Orchard Bush and are characterised by open water and long, thicker grasses. The Fadamas vary in character with the amount of rainfall but are usually open areas of grass and water, sometimes to depths of 5', bordered by small bushes and occasionally semi-permanent pools. The fadama at Sanolo included two large man-made dams, built below the motel in an attempt to attract big game. These dams were fringed with reeds and bushes growing on the sides of bare earth walls.

We also worked the limited areas of scarp in the Reserve and near Damongo, south of the Reserve boundary. Although rarely more than 200' high, these scarps often had present species rarely found elsewhere. As well as areas of bare rock and scree, groups of fruit bearing trees were also found there.

The final habitat we distinguished was that of settlement and cultivation. Apart from the immediate environs of the huts and buildings with mown grass and specially selected trees there were also limited areas of cultivated ground. These were in different stages of cultivation from bare earth to fruiting crops of a variety of types.

The Expedition was present in the Reserve from 24th July 1968 to 7th September 1968. This is the wet season in northern Ghana and maximum temperatures ranged from 31°C to 37°C while minimum temperatures never fell below 20°C. Relative humidity ranged from 66% to 95%, and a total of 13.1" of rain fell during our stay, mainly in the afternoons. This heavy rainfall caused many roads to be impassable and our movements in the Reserve were restricted but we succeeded in visiting a number of sites in the south of the area.

The following list was compiled by the Expedition during the time spent in Mole. The places and habitat types described above are referred to, and an attempt has been made to relate each species to the habitat in which we found it.

Scientific nomenclature follows White, C.M.N. (1960-65) Check List of African Birds. Lusaka, Zambia.

ANNOTATED CHECK LIST OF BIRDS

Black-headed Heron Ardea melanocephala: Definitely identified on two dates on the motel marsh in mid-August. Three large herons seen at dusk on one day were either this species or A. cinerea.

Goliath Heron Ardea goliath: Single record of one flying south along the motel scarp on 25/8.

Great White Heron Egretta alba: Single record (20/8) of one flying south over the marsh.

Green-backed Heron Butorides striatus: Numerous in marsh and wet bush but not on forested river banks. Recorded almost every day with up to 8 on the motel marsh, including immatures. More apparent when water level was high or during regular morning and evening flighting to and from roosts in large trees. Distinctive Jackdaw-like (Corvus monedula) call noted many times. One male caught and skinned.

Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax: Two records for motel marsh in late July were both in the evening.

Red-necked Little Bittern Ixobrychus minutus: Recorded on three dates in motel marsh, usually flying over thick reeds although once seen to settle in a tree.

African Dwarf Bittern Ixobrychus sturnii: Flushed from thick cover on motel marsh on three dates.

Hammerkop Scopus umbretta: Recorded on many dates, usually in pairs, on wet marsh, riverbanks, and flooded roads. Nest found high in riverside tree was found to be empty although bird had been flushed. Display flight recorded 29/8.

Wood Ibis Ibis ibis: Colony in village near eastern boundary reported in November 1968 by Game Ranger. We did not record this species ourselves.

Sacred Ibis Threskiornis aethiopica: A colony of unoccupied nests in Silk Cotton tree north of Lovi River was in use in dry season by birds described by Game Ranger as Sacred Ibis. If this information is correct they are rather far south of their range according to Bannerman (1930).

Hadada Bostrychia hagedash: A common species largely restricted to riverine forest. Often seen in trees in flocks of up to 15. Noisy in the evening or before rain.

White-faced Duck Dendrocygna viduata: Very common, especially on motel marsh, but seen also in riverine forest and wet bush at Lovi. Up to 34 recorded together near motel. Usually distinctly paired, and nuptial flight displays were noted. Never seen on open water. One female caught but not killed and skinned.

- Pygmy Goose Nettapus auritus: Two pairs on motel marsh in early morning of 22/8. Apparently prospecting old trees.
- Spur-winged Goose Plectropterus gambensis: Recorded on several dates particularly up to mid-August. Maximum of 4 on 4/8. Often seen perched in trees.
- White-backed Vulture Gyps bengalensis: Both adults and immatures recorded on five dates with maximum of 4 on 22/8. Usually recorded along motel scarp around midday.
- White-headed Vulture Trigoniceps occipitalis: Recorded on fifteen dates with maximum of 3 on 19/8, including two immatures.
- Hooded Vulture Neophron monachus: Certainly the commonest vulture especially in the villages. Recorded also around the motel although never on the ground. Maximum of 12 on 19/8 (around motel).
- Egyptian Vulture Neophron percnopterus: An adult well seen flying north along motel scarp on 9/8. This is apparently the first record for Ghana.
- Red-necked Kestrel Falco chicquera: Single record of one flying over motel marsh in mid-August.
- Grey Kestrel Falco ardosiaccus: Singles recorded at motel and Damongo scarps in late August.
- African Mountain Kestrel Falco tinnunculus rufescens: Two singles in early September which closely resembled the European race.
- Black Kite Milvus migrans: This apparently common dry season visitor was recorded on two dates (one in late July) on the Reserve. We saw it frequently in early September on the journey south to Accra.
- Tawny Eagle Aquila rapax: At least two individuals (an adult and an immature) were recorded on nearly thirty separate dates near the motel. On 16/8 the immature was watched chasing a Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis for over half an hour.
- Wahlberg's Eagle Aquila wahlbergi: Recorded with certainty on only a few occasions along the main scarps, mainly in mid-late August.
- African Hawk Eagle Hieraaetus spilogaster: This rather rare eagle was definitely identified on three dates with two birds seen on 21/8. It was always seen near large trees.
- Martial Eagle Poloneaetus bellicosus: Recorded on fourteen dates with a maximum of 2 on 16/8. Although a wary species and although usually seen in flight, good views were obtained of some individuals settled in trees.
- Long-crested Hawk Eagle Lophoaetus occipitalis: Recorded on two dates in early September in large trees near Damongo.
- Lizard Buzzard Kaupifalco monogrammicus: Recorded on nine dates particularly in dry forest.

Brown Harrier Eagle Circus cinereus: Although only definitely identified on two dates in late July, this species was watched at close range killing and eating a small snake.

Boaudouin's Harrier Eagle Circus beaudouini: A pair were recorded on several dates up to mid-August in the motel area. This is apparently a very rare bird for Ghana, but our birds were seen well on each occasion and identified with certainty.

Bateleur Terathopius caudatus: Recorded on most days over the reserve with up to two together.

River Eagle Haliaeetus vocifer: A pair was seen on many dates around the motel marsh and were thought to be nesting. The first juvenile was recorded on 11/8. Otherwise occasionally seen in riverine forest at Mognori and Lovi.

Palm-nut Vulture Gypohierax angolensis: Commonly recorded over motel marsh and riverine forest. Up to three seen together with immatures after 5/8.

Red-tailed Buzzard Buteo auguralis: Recorded on only two dates along motel scarp.

Ovampo Sparrowhawk Accipiter ovampenis: A probable was identified over the motel marsh on 31/7.

West African Black Sparrowhawk Accipiter melanoleucos: Several records of a pair of this species from the motel and Damongo scarps.

Eritrean Shikra Accipiter badius: Only one record for 28/7 of an immature flying along the motel scarp.

West African Goshawk Accipiter toussenotii: What was probably an immature of this species was watched at close range attacking a Black-billed Wood Dove Turtur abyssinica in one of our mist nets.

Chestnut-flanked Goshawk Accipiter castanilius: This difficult species was watched at close range both in flight and settled in riverine forest near the motel on 31/7. According to Bammerman(1930) it is a forest species.

Pale Chanting Goshawk Melierax metabates: A single record of an individual along the motel scarp on the 14/8.

Gabar Goshawk Meliorax gabar: This species was identified over the motel marsh on two dates in late July and early August.

White-throated Francolin Francoelinus albogularis: This scarce species was identified on only five dates from the Lovi-Larabanga road in dry bush.

Double-spurred Francolin Francoelinus bicalcaratus: Extremely numerous in dry orchard bush and even riverine forest, but avoided wet ground. Recorded every day. Three caught and one skin taken.

Stone Partridge Ptilopachus petrosus: Small parties found commonly in dry orchard bush, riverine forest and especially on the scarp slopes. Heard calling regularly in the evening. One caught and skin taken.

Grey-breasted Helmet Guinea-fowl: Nunida melocgris: Very common in dry orchard bush, wet bush and near settlement. Often seen picking grit from roads and sometimes perched in trees.

Black Crane Limnocorax flavirostra: Recorded on ten dates from motel marsh and wet marsh at Lovi and Mognori. Somewhat wary although seen feeding in the open on several occasions.

Lesser Gallinule Porphyryla alleni: Recorded on seventeen dates from motel marsh. Usually very secretive although seen feeding in open in early mornings or during high water. Up to five seen together.

Jacana Actophilornis africanus: Very common, and recorded every day from wet marsh. Distinct preference for open areas where they fed in scattered flocks of up to twenty birds. One caught and skin taken.

Forbe's Banded Plover Charadrius forbesi: Up to two recorded from the same stretch of flooded road near Lovi on eight dates. Also one on dam side near motel on 26/8. Usually very tame.

Common Sandpiper Tringa hypoleucos: Recorded on ten dates after 3/8 especially along the Lovi River on sandbanks. Also seen on motel marsh after high water from 16/8 - 29/8 with a maximum of three on 16/8.

Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola: Recorded flying over the motel marsh on three dates from 27/7 - 31/8.

Redshank Tringa totanus: A single bird feeding unconcernedly among playing children in flooded road near Damongo on 23/8. This is a rare inland migrant in Ghana.

Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus: Single record of three birds flying north over the motel on 21/8. Identified mainly by call. Again this is apparently a scarce inland migrant in Ghana.

Red-eyed Turtle Dove Streptopelia semitorquata: Commonly recorded from wet bush and marsh, and flying over riverine forest. This was one of the main constituent species in the marked morning and evening dove flights at Lovi and the motel. Two caught and one skin taken.

Niger Mourning Dove Streptopelia decipiens: This dry country dove was identified on a few occasions in the dove feeding flights at Lovi and the motel.

Vinaceous Turtle Dove Streptopelia vinacea: This was certainly the commonest dove, favouring in particular the dry orchard bush near roads. Parties of up to twenty were recorded feeding on roads and smaller parties were sometimes encountered in dry and riverine forest. Two caught and one skin taken.

Laughing Dove Streptopelia senegalensis: Although recorded every day, this species was restricted to the environs of settlements. There was one record of a pair in a recently deserted village site at Kabampe. A nest with two eggs was found near the motel on 23/7 and in August juvenile birds regularly entered our compound building to feed on the kitchen floor. Two caught but no skins taken.

Red-billed Wood Dove Turtur afer: We identified this species on seven dates from riverine forest, especially at Lovi. It is of particular interest that we found both species of Wood Dove on the Reserve while they never consorted together.

Black-billed Wood Dove Turtur abyssinicus: A common dove in thick orchard bush and near cultivated land. Recorded every day near motel although did not take place in dove feeding flights. Ten caught and two skins taken.

Yellow-bellied Fruit Pigeon Treeron waalia: Recorded on seventeen dates mainly from thick forest where it was watched feeding on Ficus trees. Often took part in dove feeding movements near motel and at Lovi.

Green Fruit Pigeon Treeron australis: Recorded from thick forest and in dove movements on fourteen dates, often in company of T. waalia.

Brown-necked Parrot Poicephalus robustus: Recorded on nineteen dates over riverine forest, apparently in daily feeding movements. This is apparently a rare parrot in the north of Ghana but we recorded up to four together.

Senegal Parrot Poicephalus senegalus: This was the commonest parrot, recorded almost every day over the motel in daily feeding movements. Small parties of up to twenty birds often included both orange and yellow bellied forms mentioned by Bannerman.

Long-tailed Parakeet Psittacula krameri: Recorded on most days in feeding movements over riverine forest both at Lovi and at the motel, but in smaller numbers than Poicephalus senegalus.

Red-headed Lovebird Agapornis pullaria: Up to two recorded on six dates in wet bush at Lovi and the motel. One caught and skin taken.

African Barn Owl Tyto alba: One killed on road and skin taken. Single flushed from roosting cave at Damongo scarp in late August.

Pearl-spotted Owlet Glaucidium perlatum: Single record of one in dry forest on 3/9.

Spotted Eagle Owl Bubo africanus: A number of large owls seen at night in the reserve were probably of this species. One definite specimen was killed on the road on 12/8 and the skin was taken.

Milky Eagle Owl Bubo lacteus: An almost certain example was seen well and described in dry forest on Damongo scarp on 3/9. This is considered rare by Bannerman.

Violet Plantain-eater Musophaga violacea: Recorded on thirteen dates mainly from riverine forest where it consorted in high trees in small parties.

Grey Plantain-eater Crinifer piscator: Both common and widespread on the Reserve, particularly in dry or riverine forest. Up to six were seen together with nuptial display observed on 26/7 and copulation on 15/8.

African Yellow-billed Cuckoo Cuculus canorus: Single watched at very close range for several minutes in Riverine forest at Lovi on 26/8. This is a very early date for the latitude.

Pied Cuckoo Clamator jacobinus: Up to two recorded from large trees in orchard bush on four dates. All were of the white-breasted form. This bird is considered very rare in Ghana by Bannerman.

Levaillant's Cuckoo Clamator levaillantii: Recorded on five dates from riverine forest and orchard bush. Maximum of 5 at Mognori on 19/8.

Didric Cuckoo Chrysococcyx caprius: Recorded on nine dates mainly from riverine forest or over motel marsh.

Klaas' Cuckoo Chrysococcyx Klaas: Recorded on four dates with two pairs in dry forest at Samole in late August. One female caught and skin taken.

Senegal Coucal Centropus senegalensis: Very common and recorded every day from all types of habitat. Increase in numbers noted in late August near motel when one was seen carrying a leaf. Watched destroying an Estrildine's nest at Lovi. One caught and skin taken.

Plain Nightjar Caprimulgus inornatus: Nightjars which were probably of this species were recorded on three dates from scarp slopes and the road at dusk. Up to two were seen together.

Long-tailed Nightjar Caprimulgus climacurus: Recorded on several dates at dusk particularly over the motel marsh where up to 6 would regularly feed together. Two caught and one skin taken. In moult.

White-rumped Swift Apus caffer: Several recorded over road near Larabanga on 27/7. Only other record was of two with many other swifts over motel marsh on 21/8.

Little African Swift Apus affinis: Recorded on many dates, mainly in small numbers over motel marsh and scarp.

Palm Swift Cypsiurus parvus: The commonest swift, recorded on many days in varying numbers. Certainly we did not find this species restricted to the vicinity of borassus palms as Bannerman suggests, but over a wide variety of habitats.

Gold Coast Spine-tailed Swift Chaetura ussheri: Up to eight recorded from Lovi on many dates with a few additional sightings over the motel marsh and at Damongo.

Blue-bellied Roller Coracias cyanogaster: Recorded on four dates from dry forest and orchard bush near roads. Up to 4 together.

Broad-billed Roller Eurystomus glaucurus: Recorded on more than sixteen dates, particularly in small parties flying high at dusk. Marked preference for open marshy ground near riverine forest was noted but also seen over dry orchard bush.

Guinea Wood-hoopoe Phoeniculus purpureus: Small parties recorded on twenty dates in dry orchard bush and dry and riverine forest in several localities. One caught and skin taken.

Least Wood-hoopoe Phoeniculus aterrimus: Recorded on eight dates mainly in dry and riverine forest. Usually in pairs. One caught (an imm. male) and skin taken.

Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis: Up to two recorded on twelve dates from motel marsh, particularly after high water.

Giant Kingfisher Ceryle maxima: Singles recorded on fourteen dates from riverine forest especially near moghori.

Malachite Kingfisher Alcedo cristata: Recorded on many dates from open marsh and wet bush. Seen with fish and flushed from hole in dam wall at motel marsh. Ten caught and one skin taken.

Pygmy Kingfisher Coxyx picta: Recorded on eleven dates, usually in pairs, from riverine forest, dry forest, and, less commonly, the motel marsh. Found feeding on insects. Eleven caught and one skin taken.

Senegal Kingfisher Halcyon senegalensis: Recorded regularly from motel marsh, wet bush and near riverine forest. One caught but no skin taken.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon malimbica: Recorded on four dates from riverine forest at Lovi and on one occasion in wet bush at motel. Two caught and one skin taken. Crushed beetles were found in the stomach. Bannerman considers this to be a forest species.

Grey-headed Kingfisher Halcyon leucocephala: Single record from riverine forest at Lovi on 3/8. Bannerman considers this to be a scarce species of the thorn-scrub.

Striped Kingfisher Halcyon chelicuti: Recorded almost every day near motel area and also from forest at Lovi and Samole. Marked preference for tall trees in open bush and telegraph wires.

Rosy Bee-eater Merops malimbicus: One record of a single in wet bush near Lovi marsh on 7/8. According to Bannerman this is a very local species.

Carmine Bee-eater Merops nubicus: Singles recorded from tall trees near motel marsh in mid-August. According to Bannerman this is a bird of the semi-arid belt.

Least Bee-eater Merops pusillus: Up to two recorded in pairs on many dates. Distinct preference for open grassy glades in wet bush was noted. Very tame. One caught and skin taken.

Red-throated Bee-eater Merops bullocki: Certainly this was one of the commonest species with parties of up to twenty recorded every day. Although having

a distinct preference for tall trees near water, it was recorded in all other habitats. Forty-three caught and four skins taken. Most in moult. Wing: 95-103mm. Tail: 84-104mm. Bill: 32-40mm. Tarsus: 10-14mm. Weight: 20-26gms.

Red-throated Bee-eater, Golden-throated Variety Merops bulocki var. Boleslavski: Recorded on several occasions in riverine forest at Lovi with up to three together. Although Fry (in litt.) considers it to form 1% of the population of M. bulocki, our two skins increase the world museum population by 50%.

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater Merops hirundineus: Small parties recorded on four dates from two localities where there were large trees in dry orchard bush. Bannerman considers this an extremely local species.

Ground Hornbill Bucovorus abyssinicus: Although we only recorded this species on two dates it has been seen more regularly by others in the dry season.

Bearded Barbet Lybius dubius: Recorded on fourteen dates mainly from large trees and forest. Two caught and skins taken. Many cestodes found in stomachs.

West African Barbet Lybius vieilloti: Recorded on four dates from wet bush especially large trees near scarps. Two females caught and skins taken.

Yellow-fronted Tinker-bird Pogoniulus chrysoconus: Recorded on eleven dates from wet and dry orchard bush but with distinct preference for larger trees.

Black-throated Honey-guide Indicator indicator: Recorded on seven dates from wet bush and larger trees. Invariably in pairs. One female caught and skin taken.

Lesser Honey-guide Indicator minor: Single record of one heard and seen well in wet orchard bush at Lovi on 9/8.

Fine-spotted Woodpecker Campothera punctuligera: Recorded from dry orchard bush and dry forest on twelve dates. One caught and skin taken.

Little White-spotted Woodpecker Dendropicos obsoletus: Recorded on five dates from tall trees in wet orchard bush, scarp slope and dry forest.

Grey Woodpecker Mesopicos goertae: Recorded on six dates from large trees in orchard bush. One male caught and skin taken. Testes much reduced.

to be continued

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