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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest  
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NOTES.BOOTED EAGLE NEAR KANO

At c.1200 hours on 6th January 1970, I was being driven N. along the Zaria-Kano road (c.15 miles south of Kano). Looking ahead, I spotted a large gathering of vultures and Black Kites Milvus migrans. I asked my driver to slow down and we were passing under them at c.10-15 m.p.h. when from the right came a smaller and strikingly pale raptor. It swung low (c. 25ft.) over the car, circled and then moved off left. The view was brief but very close and in excellent light. The following features were noted:-

Size: smallish; bulk not much more than Milvus

Shape: rather long-winged and particularly long-tailed (noticeably more so than a Wahlberg's Eagle Aquila walhlbergi seen on the next day).

Plumage: Head with dark (brown) crown and eye-patches contrasting with pale creamy forehead, supercilia and throat (not unlike an immature Grasshopper Buzzard seen earlier in the morning); mantle blotched brown and whitish, wingcoverts as mantle or a little paler, wing linings pale creamy (unmarked) and both contrasting with brownish black flight-feathers, tail also dark brown lacking barring but with a thin whitish terminal band, underparts pale creamy overall (at least to flanks).

Flight: less sluggish than Luteo, reminiscent of small eagle.

Sketches were also made of wing and tail pattern. My immediate reaction was one of puzzlement since the bird was clearly not any common Nigerian raptor and yet the wing and tail pattern rang a bell.

On my return to Lagos on 8th January, I was able to refer to three African handbooks and identify the bird as a pale phase Booted Eagle Hierraetus pennatus. It was clearly an extremely pale morph but the one featured in the plate of this species in the Birds of North Africa (Etchecopar and Hue, 1968) is equally so. I have been familiar with the species since 1961.

Booted Eagles move south in winter on both sides of N. Africa but this is the only record I am aware of for Nigeria since R.E. Sharland recorded one at Kano on 27th January, 1962 (Elgood, Sharland and Ward 1965: Ibis 108: 99).

D.I.M. Wallace.