



West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain



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CORRESPONDENCE

To: The Editor,
Nigerian Ornithologists' Society.

Dear Editor,

"MOLE GAME RESERVE LIST"

BY

W.G. HARVEY AND I.D. HARRISON

Messrs. Harvey and Harrison are to be congratulated in making known to readers the avifauna potential of the Mole Reserve. However, it seems necessary to make some critical remarks in fairness to Dr. Bannerman and his many diligent informants of those earlier (and much harder) times in West Africa.

The article misleads the reader to think that northern Ghana is not a "dry country" and this impression was undoubtedly due to the exceptional wet season of 1968 that they experienced. From late September 1968, the flood gates at the Akosombo dam had to be fully open for over 3 months to allow the excess water to flow away. In a year of average rain fall in the North the gates may be opened for only a few weeks. The lists therefore, at the end of the article are generally inaccurate.

Apart from a few of the species the list for dry country birds is typical of what you see throughout northern Ghana as it is a "dry country" for most of the year. The list of species only thought to have been forest species is perhaps the most inaccurate and Bannerman has been misread.

What Bannerman writes is as follows:-

Brown-necked Parrot: "confined to the drier parts of West Africa" Page 519.

Blackcap-Babbler: "frequents closed forests and most types of parklands" Page 841.

Oriole-Babbler: "Ranging throughout the savanna belt", Gambia is mentioned as part of its range. Page 846/847.

Simple Leaf-Love: "occasionally more open bush among tall grass" Page 876.

Red-billed Wood-Dove: "as much at home in forest clearings as in the open bush. In the grass country it becomes less numerous than in the tree savanna and as the dry belt nears the desert its numbers quickly diminish", Page 509.

White-bellied Crombec: "It is found in forest (probably second growth) and in thickets of dense bush, visiting plantations in savanna country". (Page 1061).

Long-tailed Sunbird: "8°N may be taken as the southern limit of this species". This is at least 200 miles south of the Mole game reserve. Harvey and Harrison quote Bannerman as saying that this is a dry country bird implying that Mole isn't. Bannerman is correct but the dry country extends 200 miles south of Mole.

It is always dangerous to list a species as rare in an area little worked by ornithologists. Their comments for Cisticola emini is perhaps typical. It was first located in Ghana by Lamm and others in 1958 on the Accra Plains. It was then found along the Gambaga escarpment by myself only because this happens to be accessible by car. One should not conclude from such observations that it is rare, better to conclude that travel in N. Ghana and to rocky out crops is difficult. R.N.W. Sutton's comments at the end of his paper in the same issue emphasise this and the fact that resident ornithologists have been few and far between in N. Ghana. He writes "as was to be expected, certain species rarely or never recorded in Ghana before were found in some cases quite commonly".

Finally it is a very doubtful advantage to list many species of which the identifications are not absolutely certain and in any exceptional case this should be clearly indicated by placing the whole record in brackets. Without wishing to be unjust to their good work, we have grave doubts concerning the separation of so many accipiters and their allies - a notoriously difficult group - by observers who are very inexperienced in a West African sense.

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