



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



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THE BIRDS OF AFRICA, VOL. 3. Ed. by C.H. Fry, S. Keith and E.K. Urban (1988) 611pp., Academic Press, London. £71.50. ISBN 0-12-137303-7.

This third volume in the magnificent Birds of Africa series covers Parrots to Woodpeckers, with contributions from sixteen different authors. Inevitably it has the flavour of a compendium and so lacks the personal idiosyncracies which delighted or irritated readers of Bannerman's volumes, so long the 'Bible' of West African ornithologists, but the book more than makes up for a less lively text with up to date information, a wealth of detail, comprehensive illustrations and, of course, a Pan-African perspective. With all the non-passerines now dealt with in volumes which have already become standard works, the publishers deserve congratulations and encouragement to pursue the project to its conclusion.

The style and layout are the same as for Volume 2 so only a minimal introduction is included, on the assumption that purchasers of Volume 3 already possess an earlier tome. However, the scheme for the maps is re-explained. While the map layout is an improvement on Volume 1, Volume 3 perpetuates some of the sins of its forbears. Some of the shadings on the distribution maps are obscure: a hand-lens is needed to see where Tauraco fischeri occurs, although a similar fate for T. ruspolii is avoided by the judicious use of an arrow. The shading patterns used are difficult to distinguish from each other. Worse, some of the maps do not always agree with the text. For instance the first account in the book (Grey Parrot Psittacus erithacus) makes the doubtful statement that the species is widely distributed in Togo and Benin but the map is probably nearer the truth of the bird's present status, leaving as it does all Togo and Benin devoid of P. erithacus. Confidence in the distribution descriptions and the maps is not improved by other accounts, e.g. there are published records of the Great Blue Turaco Corythaëola cristata in Togo but the map leaves a gap between western Ghana and Nigeria; and Pel's Fishing Owl Scotopelia peli is known from 19 localities in the Ivory Coast (Thiollay, J.M. 1985, Malimbus 7: 27) as well as other countries in the map's blank space between Sierra Leone and Nigeria. There are other examples of similar discrepancies and I suspect that Volume 4 will need a list of errata for Volume 3 longer than Volume 3's for Volumes 1 and 2. But this is inevitable in such a massive undertaking as the Birds of Africa has become.

The 32 colour plates are by Martin Woodcock, who travelled to Africa especially to prepare some of the paintings. In most cases he has succeeded admirably in capturing the essence of his subjects. I was particularly pleased by the kingfishers and barbets. It is a great service to be provided with colour plates of the nightjars, but a shame that they are made to look so moribund.

The swifts, so magnificent in life, also disappoint but by and large Woodcock's illustrations are excellent. For the passerines in the ensuing volumes we are promised a format for the plates more akin to a field guide. Volume 3 is liberally peppered with line drawings, mostly by Ian Willis but with some by Hilary Fry, and these do much to add life to the somewhat dry species accounts. I look forward to more of the same in the future volumes.

Information on tape recordings was compiled by C. Chappius, who has also provided a bibliography of the recorded sounds, but the book does not include sonograms.

Although aspects of the taxonomy employed, especially some of the vernacular names, may upset purists, the Editors have trodden a sensible path and it is to be hoped that their decisions will be followed universally so that African ornithologists can have a standard to rely on. But how long current taxonomic ideas will last is anybody's guess with the advent of molecular techniques. Let us hope that the remaining volumes in this splendid series are completed before it has become the fashion to reproduce DNA fingerprints in all taxonomic literature!

R.A. Cheke

A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF TERN CATCHING IN SENEGAL, WINTER 1987/1988 by P.L. Meininger (1988) 47 pp. ICBP, Cambridge. (From ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, UK).

BIRDS IN COASTAL SENEGAL, WINTER 1987/1988 by P.L. Meininger (1988) 41pp. (From the author at Belfort 7, 4336 JK Middelburg, The Netherlands; by cash or transferring £5 sterling, US \$10, or Dfl 15 to Dutch postal giro account number 874 895 attn. P.L. Meininger, Middelburg).

Tern catching on the west coast of Africa has become recognised as a major threat to the maintenance of the tern populations of West Africa and Europe. Roseate Terns are particularly threatened and an effective conservation programme by the Ghanaian government, the UK Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the International Council for Bird Preservation has been successfully implemented in Ghana, led by WAOS member Dr Ya Ntiamao-Baidu. Evidence from ringing recoveries points to a similar problem in Senegal and these publications give results from an expedition to investigate tern catching by Peter Meininger and Greetje Boerma in the winter of 1987-1988.

The ICBP Study Report is a well written, concise document that reviews ringing recoveries, evaluates the results of interviews made at 27 towns and villages along the coast about tern catching and gives an excellent species-by-species account of the distribution and status of 15 tern species along the coast of Senegal. Although tern catching is mainly practised by boys of 7-15 years of age for fun and occasionally for eating, the overall extent of catching in Senegal is such that up 20,000 may be killed per year. The report finishes with a brief summary of suggestions for tern conservation in Senegal. All-in-all, well recommended.

The privately published report on 'Birds in Senegal' is a useful annotated checklist of the 254 species that were recorded during observations on tern catching. Included is a summary of Palaearctic migrant waders wintering in Senegal, which number up to 100,000 birds. A useful addition to the library of West African ornithologists.

H.Q.P. Crick