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The birds of the Kounounkan Massif, Guinea

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Summary

A ten-day field survey of monsoon forest in western Guinea found 134 bird species. One, *Picathartes gymnocephalus*, is listed by IUCN as Vulnerable and four, *Francolinus achantensis*, *Ceratogymna elata*, *Platysteira blissetti* and *Apalis sharpii*, are Candidate Threatened Species. Due to its position at the edge of the Upper Guinea forest block, the forest avifauna contained a high percentage of dry country birds.

Résumé

Une recherche de dix jours sur le terrain en forêt ombrophile de l'ouest de la Guinée a permis de trouver 134 espèces d'oiseaux. L'une d'elles, *Picathartes gymnocephalus*, est classée par l'UICN comme Espèce Vulnérable et quatre, *Francolinus achantensis*, *Ceratogymna elata*, *Platysteira blissetti* et *Apalis sharpii*, comme Espèces Menacées Possibles. Eu égard à sa situation en bordure du massif forestier de Haute Guinée, l'avifaune forestière possédait un pourcentage élevé d'oiseaux de région sèche.

Introduction

As in many West African countries, there has been extensive deforestation throughout Guinea (Barnes 1990), although remnant forest patches, some of the last in the west of the country, still exist around the Kounounkan Massif (Wilson 1992), an area also sometimes known as "Kamalayah" (e.g. Bournonville 1967, Wilson 1992). Some 5032 ha in extent, the Kounounkan Massif is a sandstone outlier of the Fouta Djallon, where the Loma-Man dorsal meets the coastal plain. The massif is situated about 90 km east of the capital, Conakry, in Forecariah

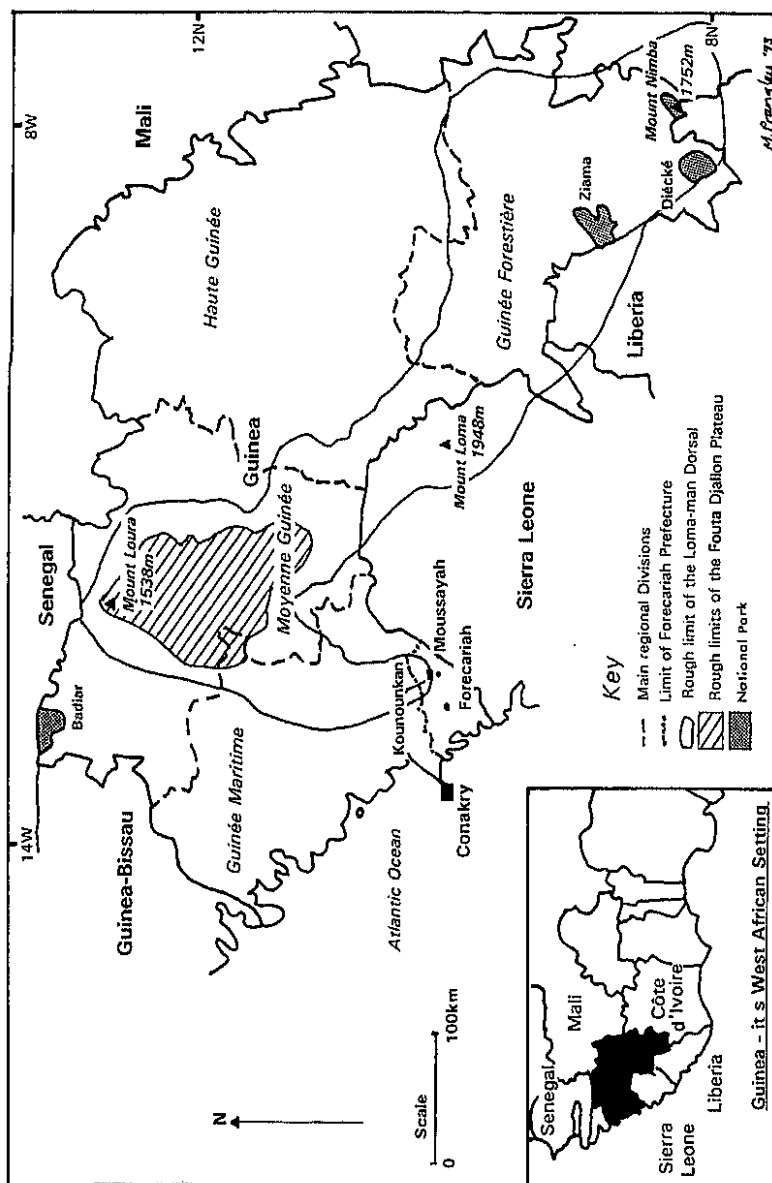


Figure 1. Sketch map of Guinea, showing major features mentioned in the text.

Prefecture (Fig. 1). The massif has been dissected by riverine erosion, leaving a number of plateaux and steep-sided ravines. It is in the ravines that forest still survives, whilst on the ridge tops there is some natural savanna and on the lower slopes a mixture of farmbush and secondary regeneration.

The forest here is at the north-western extremity of the Upper Guinea forest block (Ackery 1991, Wilson 1992), in the area which White (1983) classified as a mosaic of Guineo-Congolian woodland and secondary grassland. Recent botanical studies (J. Komah, pers. comm.), found *Azelia africana* (Caesalpinaceae), *Aningeria altissima* (Sapotaceae), *Cola gigantea* (Sterculiaceae) and *Morus mesozygia* (Moraceae), indicator species which would place Kounounkan's vegetation in White's "drier peripheral semi-evergreen Guineo-Congolian rain forest" phytocoenosis. The climate is monsoonal with a distinct wet season from April to November.

The area was in the process of designation as a forest reserve in the 1950s (Pinauld et al. 1952), but this was interrupted by independence in 1958 and only resumed in late 1989 (see Barnett *et al.* 1994). We have been unable to find any records of previous ornithological work at Kounounkan, although there are various references to the Conakry area (e.g. Richards 1982, Browne 1984) and elsewhere in Guinea (e.g. Brosset 1984, Walsh 1987, Morel & Morel 1988, Halleux 1994).

Methods

At the request of the Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Chasse (DNFC), a preliminary assessment of the conservation value of the Kounounkan Massif was undertaken during November and December 1992, and part of this included a survey of the birds. Ten full days were spent in the field. Three localities were surveyed extensively by PVH, MP and AB, two in primary or near-primary forest and one in regenerating farmbush. Further observations were also made in farmbush and around towns and villages. Additionally, in six villages adjacent to the Kounounkan Massif, DD carried out surveys of the extent and species-focus of local hunting. He used the regional language, Susu.

Results

One hundred and thirty-four species were recorded (see Appendix), which included a mixture of species typical of the Upper Guinea forest block (e.g. *Stephanoetus coronatus*, *Criniger barbatus*, *Alethe poliocephala*; for English names see Appendix) and species more typical of dry country (e.g. *Polemaetus bellicosus*, *Streptopelia vinacea*). Using Thiollay's (1985) categorisation of true forest bird species, it was possible to compare the composition of the avifauna of

Kounounkan with that of other forests in the western part of the Upper Guinea forest block. The percentage of true forest species was calculated from the total number of species given in Ausden & Wood (1990) for the Western Area Forest, Sierra Leone, Allport *et al.* (1989) for Gola Forest, SE Sierra Leone, and Bourque & Wilson (1990) for the forest at Diecke and Ziamia in SE Guinea. The percentage of forest species was highest in Diecke (54%), intermediate in Gola (46%), Ziamia (44%) and Western Area (40%), and lowest at Kounounkan (34%). This follows the trends in increased climatic aridity and increasing proportion of open, dryland vegetation as the northerly Sahel Zone is approached (see White 1983).

Picathartes gymnocephalus, which is regarded as Vulnerable by Collar & Stuart (1985), was found in the Kounounkan forest. Single birds were seen on three occasions in the ten-day period. Although the data are few, this seems to represent a very high encounter rate (cf. Allport *et al.* 1989, Ausden & Wood 1990). Also, two rocks used as breeding sites were found, both along the same steep-sided stream bed in primary forest. The first rock was approximately 12 m high and 20 m wide with a slight overhang. It had 12 nests on it, nine of which were old, one was a newly built cup and two were new cups with linings. The second rock was more steeply overhanging, about 8 m wide, 4 m high at its highest, but with only 2 m of vertical face below the overhang. There were two newly-built nest cups on the vertical face at the base of the overhang.

Apart from a possible sighting by Richards (1982) at Kakulima Hill near Conakry, there are no records of this species in W Guinea (see map in Thompson & Fotso 1995). These sightings, therefore, represent a north-westerly range extension of approximately 125 km, the nearest known birds being in the Western Area Forest, Sierra Leone (Ausden & Wood 1990, Thompson 1993, Thompson & Fotso 1995).

Unlike at Gola Forest, where *P. gymnocephalus* was familiar to local people and even given religious significance (Allport *et al.* 1989), the people (including hunters) in the Kounounkan area did not seem to know of the species at all.

The following species were recorded which were candidates for inclusion in Collar & Stuart (1985): *Francolinus achantensis*, *Ceratogymna elata*, *Platysteira blissetti* and *Apalis sharpii*. The hornbill and the apalis were recorded in the forest, whereas the francolin and the wattle-eye were both recorded in thick, regenerating, farmbush. A species of *Malacocincla* was also recorded in the farmbush. Its identity was never resolved, but it was either the Near-threatened *M. rufescens* or the Candidate *M. puvelli*. Several over-wintering Palaearctic migrants were seen in both the forest and farmbush habitats, including *Ficedula hypoleuca*.

The hunting pressures around Kounounkan appeared to be lower than in other parts of Guinea (e.g. Bourque & Wilson 1990), and considerably lower than in other parts of the Upper Guinea forest block (e.g. Robinson 1971, Verschuren 1983). The six surveyed villages had only ten hunters in total and some of these never hunted in the forest. Their targets were mostly larger mammals (e.g. duikers), and consequently there was little pressure on the birds. This was borne

out by a reasonable number of sightings of such large species as *Corythaeola cristata*, which are favoured quarry elsewhere.

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Appendix

Bird species recorded at Kounounkan (Nov-Dec 1992)

Each species is recorded by habitat (forest or farmbush) and in each habitat the species is given a simple abundance rating based on encounter rates.

* = Candidate threatened species (Collar & Stuart 1985)

** = Vulnerable species (Collar & Stuart 1985)

Status at Kounounkan

1 = Rare (< 5 records)

2 = Frequent (> 5 records but not found daily)

3 = Moderately Common (recorded daily)

4 = Common (> 5 records daily)

5 = Abundant (large numbers recorded daily)

Habitat: FB = farmbush; F = forest.

	Abundance in:	
	FB	F
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i> Cattle Egret	2	
<i>Ardea cinerea</i> Grey Heron	1	
<i>Scopus umbretta</i> Hamerkop	2	
<i>Milvus migrans</i> Black Kite	4	
<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i> Palm-nut Vulture	2	2
<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i> Hooded Vulture	4	
<i>Circus cinereus</i> Brown Snake Eagle	1	
<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i> Harrier Hawk	2	
<i>Circus aeruginosus</i> Marsh Harrier	1	
<i>Accipiter tachiro</i> African Goshawk	1	1
<i>A. badius</i> Shikra	2	
<i>A. erythropus</i> Western Little Sparrowhawk	1	
<i>A. melanoleucus</i> Great Sparrowhawk	1	
<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i> Lizard Buzzard	1	
<i>Buteo auguralis</i> Red-necked Buzzard	2	1
<i>Stehanoetus coronatus</i> Crowned Eagle	1	
<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i> Martial Eagle	1	
<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i> Grey Kestrel	1	
<i>F. biarmicus</i> Lanner	2	
* <i>Francolinus achantensis</i> Ahanta Francolin	2	
<i>F. bicalcaratus</i> Double-spurred Francolin	3	
<i>Himantornis haematopus</i> Nkulengu Rail	1	

	Abundance in:	
	FB	F
<i>Treron calva</i> Green Pigeon	1	2
<i>Turtur tympanistria</i> Tambourine Dove	3	3
<i>T. afer</i> Red-billed Wood Dove	3	
<i>Columba iriditorques</i> Western Bronze-naped Pigeon	2	
<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i> Red-eyed Dove	4	
<i>S. vinacea</i> Vinaceous Dove	1	
<i>S. senegalensis</i> Laughing Dove	4	
<i>Corythaeola cristata</i> Great Blue Turaco	2	2
<i>Tauraco persa</i> Green Turaco	3	3
<i>Crinifer piscator</i> Grey Plantain-eater	2	
<i>Oxylophus levaillantii</i> Levaillant's Cuckoo		1
<i>Ceuthmochares aereus</i> Yellowbill	1	1
<i>Centropus leucogaster</i> Black-throated Coucal	1	
<i>C. senegalensis</i> Senegal Coucal	3	
<i>Strix woodfordii</i> Wood Owl		1
<i>Macrodipteryx longipennis</i> Standard-winged Nightjar	1	
<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i> Palm Swift	4	
<i>Apus apus</i> Common Swift	2	
<i>A. affinis</i> Little Swift	4	
<i>Tachymarpis aequatorialis</i> Mottled Swift	1	
<i>Apaloderma narina</i> Narina's Trogon		2
<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i> Grey-headed Kingfisher	1	
<i>H. malimbica</i> Blue-breasted Kingfisher	1	1
<i>H. senegalensis</i> Senegal Kingfisher	1	
<i>Ceyx picta</i> Pygmy Kingfisher	1	
<i>Corythornis leucogaster</i> White-bellied Kingfisher		1
<i>Alcedo quadribrachys</i> Shining Blue Kingfisher		1
<i>Merops albicollis</i> White-throated Bee-eater	3	
<i>M. apiaster</i> European Bee-eater	1	
<i>Coracias abyssinica</i> Abyssinian Roller	1	
<i>Tockus fasciatus</i> Allied Hornbill	3	3
<i>T. nasutus</i> Grey Hornbill	1	
* <i>Ceratogymna elata</i> Yellow-casqued Hornbill		2
<i>Gymnobucco calvus</i> Naked-faced Barbet	1	1
<i>Pogoniulus atroflavus</i> Red-rumped Tinkerbird	1	1
<i>P. bilineatus</i> Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	3	3
<i>Lybius bidentatus</i> Double-toothed Barbet	1	
<i>Campethera nivosa</i> Buff-spotted Woodpecker	1	1
<i>Dendropicos pyrrhogaster</i> Fire-bellied Woodpecker		1
<i>Hirundo rustica</i> European Swallow	2	

	Abundance in:	
	FB	F
<i>Psolidoprocne obscura</i> Fanti Rough-wing	3	
<i>Motacilla clara</i> Mountain Wagtail		2
<i>Anthus trivialis</i> Tree Pipit	2	
<i>Prionops caniceps</i> Red-billed Helmet Shrike		2
<i>Tchagra senegala</i> Black-crowned Tchagra	1	
<i>Lanius collaris</i> Fiscal Shrike	1	
<i>Oriolus brachyrhynchus</i> Black-headed Oriole		2
<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i> Glossy-backed Drongo	1	
<i>D. atripennis</i> Shining Drongo		3
<i>Ptilostomus afer</i> Piapiac	1	
<i>Corvus albus</i> Pied Crow	3	
<i>Campephaga phoenicea</i> Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike		1
<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i> Common Bulbul	5	
<i>Andropadus virens</i> Little Greenbul	4	
<i>A. ansorgei</i> Ansorge's Greenbul		2
<i>A. gracilirostris</i> Slender-billed Greenbul	1	2
<i>A. latirostris</i> Yellow-whiskered Greenbul		4
<i>Baeopogon indicator</i> Honeyguide Bulbul	2	2
<i>Chlorocichla simplex</i> Simple Leaflove	1	
<i>Bleda canicapilla</i> Grey-headed Bristlebill	1	
<i>Criniger barbatus</i> Yellow-bearded Bulbul		2
<i>C. calurus</i> White-bearded Bulbul		1
<i>Nicator chloris</i> Western Nicator	2	
<i>Saxicola rubetra</i> Whinchat	1	
<i>Alethe poliocephala</i> Brown-chested Alethe		3
<i>A. diademata</i> Fire-crest Alethe	1	3
<i>Sheppardia cyornithopsis</i> Whiskered Redbreast		2
<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i> Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat	2	
<i>Neocossyphus poensis</i> White-tailed Ant-Thrush	1	3
<i>Stizhorina finschii</i> Finsch's Rusty Thrush		2
<i>Turdus pelios</i> West African Thrush	1	
<i>Malacocincla fulvescens</i> Brown Akalat		1
<i>*M. rufescens/puveli</i> Akalat sp.	1	
<i>Phyllanthus atripennis</i> Capuchin Babbler		2
<i>Turdoides reinwardii</i> Black-cap Babbler	2	
<i>**Picathartes gymnocephalus</i> White-necked Picathartes		1
<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> Reed Warbler		2
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> Blackcap	2	
<i>S. borin</i> Garden Warbler	1	
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> Willow Warbler	2	

	Abundance in:	
	FB	F
<i>Cisticola cantans</i> Singing Cisticola	1	
<i>Prinia subflava</i> Tawny-flanked Prinia	2	
* <i>Apalis sharpii</i> Sharpe's Apalis		2
<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i> Grey-backed Camaroptera	3	
<i>Macrosphenus concolor</i> Olive Longbill		2
<i>Hylia prasina</i> Green Hylia	2	2
<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> Pied Flycatcher	2	2
<i>Fraseria ocreata</i> Fraser's Forest Flycatcher		1
<i>Melaenornis edoloides</i> Black Flycatcher	2	
* <i>Platysteira blissetti</i> Red-cheeked Wattle-eye	1	
<i>P. castanea</i> Chestnut Wattle-eye		2
<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i> Paradise Flycatcher	3	3
<i>T. rufiventer</i> Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher		2
<i>Anthreptes seimundi</i> Little Green Sunbird		1
<i>A. fraseri</i> Fraser's Scarlet-tufted Sunbird		3
<i>Nectarinia venusta</i> Variable Sunbird	4	
<i>N. coccinigaster</i> Splendid Sunbird	2	
<i>N. chloropygia</i> Olive-bellied Sunbird	1	
<i>N. olivacea</i> Olive Sunbird		2
<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i> Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting	1	
<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i> Village Weaver	5	
<i>Malimbus rubricollis</i> Red-headed Malimbe		1
<i>M. malimbicus</i> Crested Malimbe		1
<i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i> Fire-crowned Bishop	1	
<i>E. ardens</i> Long-tailed Black Whydah	1	
<i>Clytospiza dybowskii</i> Dybowski's Twinspot	1	
<i>Mandingoa nitidula</i> Green-backed Twinspot	1	
<i>Spermophaga haematina</i> Bluebill	1	
<i>Estrilda melpoda</i> Orange-checked Waxbill	1	
<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i> Red-billed Firefinch	2	
<i>Lonchura cucullata</i> Bronze Mannikin	3	
<i>L. bicolor</i> Black and White Mannikin	1	