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New information on birds in Ghana, April 1991 to October 1993

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Summary

I present records of 74 bird species from Ghana, mainly from Central Region, accumulated during a stay of two and a half years. A Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* was observed, a species lacking previous Ghana records. The Piapiac *Ptilostomus afer*, formerly known only further north, was frequent at Cape Coast. Stone Partridge *Ptilopachus petrosus* was found breeding at Mole N.P.. A colony of Orange Weavers *Ploceus aurantius* was discovered near Cape Coast.

Résumé

Je présente des données sur 74 espèces d'oiseaux au Ghana, principalement de Central Region, recueillies durant un séjour de deux ans et demi. Le Faucon kobez *Falco vespertinus* a été observé pour la première fois dans le pays. Le Piapiac *Ptilostomus afer*, jusqu'ici connu seulement plus au nord, est désormais observé à Cape Coast. La reproduction de la Poule de rocher *Ptilopachus petrosus* a été notée au Parc National de Mole. Une colonie de Tisserin orangé *Ploceus aurantius* est installée près de Cape Coast.

Introduction and study area

This list results from a two and a half year stay in Ghana, April 1991 to October 1993, with absence on leave each year from mid-July to mid-September.

Most of the observations reported here were made in Central Region (Table 1; see also map in Grimes 1987). Other sites from which records are incorporated in this paper are Mole National Park (Northern Region), visited in March 1993, Shai hills N.P. (northeast of Accra) in December 1992 and March 1993, and Ankobra river (Western Region) in March 1993.

Several sites in Central Region were visited during the course of my work and on Sundays. Central Region is the second smallest Region in Ghana, situated in the

Table 1. Gazetteer. All localities are in Central Region unless Region specified in parentheses.

	N	W
Abrafo, Kakum N.P.	5°20'	1°20'
Accra (Greater Accra)	5°30'	0°15'
Ahomaho	5°25'	1°10'
Ankaful	5°7'	1°22'
Ankobra river (Western)	5°30'	2°30'
Antkwikwa	5°22'	1°15'
Assin Foso	5°42'	1°16'
Bereku	5°29'	0°40'
Birriwa	5°11'	1°9'
Brenu lagoon	5°3'	1°30'
Brimsu	5°13'	1°16'
Brisco camp 1, Kakum N.P.	5°19'	1°11'
Cape Coast	5°6'	1°15'
Dunkwa	5°59'	1°45'
Elmina	5°6'	1°27'
Kakum N.P.	5°20'	1°22'
Kafodzidzi	5°4'	1°32'
Komenda	5°5'	1°29'
Mankessim	5°17'	1°3'
Mole N.P. (Northern)	9°22'	2°0'
Pra-Suhien F.R.	5°19'	1°24'
Saltpond	5°12'	1°4'
Sekyere-Heman (Western)	5°12'	1°34'
Shai Hills (Greater Accra)	5°53'	0°3'
Subri River F.R. (Western)	5°25'	1°50'
Takoradi (Western)	4°55'	1°45'
Twifo	5°35'	1°30'
Twifo Praso	5°35'	1°35'
Weija (Greater Accra)	5°34'	0°20'
Winneba	5°27'	0°38'

centre of the southern part of the country, and covering 9826 km². It is located between approximately 5° and 6°20' N, and 0°25' and 2°15' W, and is bordered on the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The human population was 1,142,335 of which 813,193 are rural and 329,196 are city inhabitants. Its capital, Cape Coast, has about 60,000 people.

There are two geographic zones in Central Region, the coastal basin and the

forested dissected plateau. The coastal plain, with an average height of 168 m, is undulating in nature, with the occasional hill. The coastline bordering this plain is characterised by lagoons and bays such as at Winneba and Cape Coast. The forested dissected plateau stands at 240-300 m, steadily climbing northwards from the coastal plain. Different kinds of rocks give rise a variety of relief. A gently rolling landscape is found over the Lower Birrimian rocks, with hills standing about 60-90 m above the broad, flat valleys. The hills made up of Upper Birrimian rocks are, on the other hand, steep sided and rise to about 240 m above the valleys. Over the Tarkwaian rocks, the topography is rugged and hilly rather than smooth or gently undulating.

Four vegetation belts may be defined:

- the foreshore: swampy mangrove; red and white mangrove trees in the intertidal zone;
- the coastal strip: coastal scrub and grassland; scrub dense in the west but patchy in the east with grasses and wild Oil Palms *Elaeis guineensis*;
- the north: moist, semi-deciduous forest with several valuable timber trees like Obeche *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, Sapele *Entandrophragma cylindricum* and the mahogany *Khaya ivorensis*;
- the west: tropical rain forest; several layers of trees, with middle layer forming a dense cover, blocking light.

The annual rainfall varies within Central Region from 800 mm in the southeast along the coast, to 1650 mm in the northeast. The rainfall defines two zones: a coastal zone of low rainfall, where the climate is typically dry-equatorial, and a zone of higher rainfall in the north, characterised by a wet semi-equatorial climate. The rainy season runs from March to November, with a short interim period known as the little dry season about August, and the longer dry season from December to February.

The average temperatures at Saltpond range between 26.4°C and 31.0°C in March. Relative humidity varies from 40% to 70% in the south and 60% to 80% in the north.

Central Region is crossed by several coastal rivers running north-south. They are, from east to west: Ayensu, Nakwa-Ochi, Amisa-Ochi, Kakum and Pra. The Pra is by far the largest; its main tributaries are the Offin and Birim, which run more or less east-west, and which make up part of the northern boundaries of the Region. The Kakum river is important in terms of water supply; the Cape Coast area depends for its water supply on the Brimsu dam on this river. Its catchment is the Kakum forest, now a National Park.

Results

In the following list, only birds for which I obtained new information, and rare species, are included. Nomenclature and species order follow Grimes (1987), from

which summaries of the then current knowledge are given in parentheses at the end of each species account, for comparison. PM signifies Palaearctic migrant. Owing to my annual absence, for species noted as present "all year", this means recorded in all months but August.

Ardeidae

Botaurus stellaris Bittern. One record, Ankobra river, Western Region, Mar 1993. (PM, only one certain record, Mole.)

Ixobrychus sturmii Dwarf Bittern. Not uncommon resident, recorded all year, Cape Coast lagoon, Elmina saltponds and Brimsu dam. One record in forest area, Pra-Suhien Forest Reserve near Abrafo, May 1993. (Uncommon but widespread, coastal areas, only wet season.)

Tigrionis leucolophus Tiger Bittern. A few records throughout year in swampy forest areas, Pra-Suhien F.R. and Kakum N.P. (Uncommon resident, forest streams.)

Nycticorax leuconotus White-backed Night Heron. Scanty records, forest areas only (Pra-Suhien F.R. and Kakum N.P.), more often heard than seen. (Resident, uncommon; wetlands in forest, riverine woodlands.)

Ardeola ibis Cattle Egret. Common and widespread. Nesting colony in Bereku, c. 100 nests May-Jul; feeding of young observed Jun-Jul, Sep-Oct. (Common dry season visitor; breeding late May to Jul.)

Ciconiidae

Anastomus lamelligerus Openbill. One at Brimsu dam, Dec 1992. (Present all year near Weija, recorded Takoradi, not yet at Cape Coast.)

Anatidae

Nettapus auritus Pygmy Goose. One record in Central Region, two adults with an immature, Brenu lagoon, Jun 1992. Recorded Weija dam (Greater Accra), Dec 1992 to Mar 1993. (Not uncommon resident. Breeding: prospecting, Mole, Aug; immature, Weija, Jan.)

Accipitridae

Circus aeruginosus Marsh Harrier. Not uncommon PM, Sep, Dec-Apr: Komenda, Brimsu dam, Winneba wetlands, Takoradi, Weija dam. (Uncommon PM, Oct-Apr; not recorded Cape Coast.)

Buteo auguralis Red-necked Buzzard. Common all year in Central Region, but especially Nov-Jul. Immatures Apr, Cape Coast. (Common dry season breeding visitor to savanna area, some probably resident forest zone, influx of breeding birds at coast late Sep to early Jun, some remain all year)

Kaupifalco monogrammicus Lizard Buzzard. Locally common. Records 10 km north of Cape Coast, Mar and Apr, and Mankessim, Jun. Common from Winneba to Shai Hills N.P.. Not recorded in forest areas. (Not recorded Cape Coast nor Winneba.)

Lophaeetus occipitalis Long-crested Hawk-Eagle. Not uncommon: Mankessim, Apr; Assin Foso, Jun; edges of Kakum N.P., Sep; Shai Hills N.P., Dec. (Common

resident, woodland savanna; less frequent in clearings in forest region.)

Polemaetus bellicosus Martial Eagle. One record in woodland savanna, 15 km north of Cape Coast, Oct 1991. (Uncommon resident northern savannas, elsewhere occasional.)

Stephanoetus coronatus Crowned Hawk-Eagle. Two records, Kakum N.P., Oct 1991, Mar 1993. (Uncommon forest resident.)

Falconidae

Falco tinnunculus Kestrel. Only one record, Cape Coast, 3 Feb 1993. (Occasional Cape Coast and Kumasi.)

Falco vespertinus Red-footed Falcon. Only one certain record, adult male, Elmina, Apr 1993. (No certain records.)

Phasianidae

Ptilopachus petrosus Stone Partridge. Adults with five dependent young, Mole N.P., Mar 1993; five adults, Shai Hills N.P., Mar 1993. (Breeding unrecorded.)

Recurvirostridae

Himantopus himantopus Black-winged Stilt. Common PM and resident (all year in Elmina), coastal areas, lagoons and saltponds. Breeds Elmina: 15 pairs with dependent young, Jun 1993. (Regular breeder near Accra, recorded breeding Cape Coast.)

Burhinidae

Burhinus vermiculatus Water Thick-knee. Uncommon resident in Brenu lagoon. (Very uncommon, probably resident, breeding unrecorded.)

Glareolidae

Glareola nuchalis Rock Pratincole. Only recorded on forest rivers: Pra river from Twifo to south of Sekyere-Heman (300 near Sekyere-Heman, Oct 1992), and Ankobra river. (Not uncommon resident, including Pra river.)

Stercorariidae

Stercorarius parasiticus Arctic Skua. Elmina: fighting with Royal Terns *Sterna maxima* Oct 1992; two flying west, Oct 1993. (Not uncommon Holarctic migrant.)

Laridae

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern. One (perhaps others further off) at Birriwa beach, Apr 1992. (Not uncommon, occasional at Accra, but only one record further west.)

Psittacidae

Poicephalus gulielmi Red-headed Parrot. Uncommon resident in forest areas, Kakum N.P. and Dunkwa on Offin river. (Not uncommon resident in forest.)

Psittacus erithacus Grey Parrot. Common resident in forest areas, flocks of 10-50 at Abrafo, sometimes around Cape Coast. (Uncommon local resident throughout forest zone.)

Cuculidae

Chrysococcyx cupreus Emerald Cuckoo. Only one record, Pra-Suhien F.R. (Abrafo) Mar 1993. (Common resident, forest, throughout.)

Ceuthmochares aereus Yellowbill. Common resident in Central Region. Indivi-

duals in forest appeared darker than those along the Pra river. (Common resident, throughout forest zone.)

Centropus leucogaster Black-throated Coucal. One record, Pra-Suhien F.R. near Abrafo, Mar 1993. (Uncommon resident, forest and coastal thicket.)

C. toulou Black Coucal. Scanty records: one immature, Brimsu dam, Mar 1992; one immature, Weija dam, Dec 1992; around Dunkwa on Offin river, Oct 1992. (Not uncommon breeding migrant to coastal areas, mainly wet season.)

Strigidae

Bubo poensis Fraser's Eagle-Owl. Five records scattered over year (resident?) in Kakum N.P.. (Uncommon resident, forest, throughout forest zone.)

B. lacteus Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. An adult at 17.00 h, Mole N.P., Mar 1993. (Rare resident, probably overlooked, wooded savanna north of forest belt.)

Apodidae

Chaetura cassini Cassin's Spine-tailed Swift. Abrafo, Dec 1992, May 1993. (Uncommon resident, possibly overlooked but recent records may represent westward extension of range.)

C. ussheri Ussher's Spine-tailed Swift. Not uncommon, Kakum N.P., Pra-Suhien F.R., Sekyere-Heman, all records Feb-Mar. (Not uncommon resident, seasonal on Accra plains, mainly Jan-Sep, and west to Cape Coast.)

Alcedinidae

Halcyon badia Chocolate-backed Kingfisher. One record, Pra-Suhien F.R. near Abrafo, Nov 1992. (Uncommon resident, forest.)

Coraciidae

Coracias garrulus European Roller. Two records: edge of Pra-Suhien F.R., Feb 1992; Weija dam, Mar 93. (Rare PM.)

C. naevia Rufous-crowned Roller. Recorded in Central Region only on eastern border. Locally common Accra plains and Shai Hills N.P.. (Locally not uncommon seasonal migrant, savanna; status and movement uncertain; not recorded coastal strip west of Accra.)

C. cyanogaster Blue-bellied Roller. Recorded in Central Region only on eastern border: near Winneba, Jan 1992; three near Bereku, Jul 1993. Shai Hills N.P., Dec 1993. (Uncommon, status uncertain, probably resident, forest edges on Accra plain.)

Eurystomus glaucurus Broad-billed Roller. Common in Central Region Dec-Apr. (Common, dry season visitor to coastal strip west of Accra.)

Bucerotidae

Tockus nasutus Grey Hornbill. Not very common. Recorded Mar, Jun, Sep, Nov in Central Region (Komenda to Winneba). (Seasonally common, mainly Oct-May, occasional to Winneba but no records further west along coast.)

T. camurus Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill. Kakum N.P. only, 10 Nov 1991. (Rare resident, mature forest.)

T. hartlaubi Black-billed Dwarf Hornbill. North of Dunkwa on Offin river, Mar 1992; Kakum N.P., May 1993. (Not uncommon resident, forest.)

Tropicranus albocristatus White-crested Hornbill. Not uncommon resident, forest, all year: Kakum N.P., Pra-Suhien F.R. and along Pra river. Mainly in association with monkeys. (Not uncommon resident, rare at Cape Coast.)

Capitonidae

Lybius dubius Bearded Barbet. One record, Shai Hills N.P., Mar 1993. (Occasionally as far south as Yegi, 8°13'N, 0°39'W.)

Hirundinidae

Hirundo leucosoma Pied-winged Swallow. Two records in Central Region: Brimsu dam, Nov 1991; Mankessim, Jan 1992. (Rare in forest region.)

H. spilodera Preuss's Cliff Swallow. Afrotropical migrant. One record in Central Region: > 400 nesting under bridge near Ankaful, May 1991; not recorded there the two following years. (Locally not uncommon resident wherever suitable nest sites.)

Psaldiprocne obscura Fantee Rough-wing Swallow. Not uncommon, resident? Observed irregularly throughout the year, with gaps of up to a month. Nesting along road near Cape Coast, Jun. (Not uncommon inland from Cape Coast, mainly end Sep to Mar, but several wet season sightings. Nesting Takoradi-Cape Coast road, month uncertain.)

Campephagidae

Coracina azurea Blue Cuckoo-shrike. Three records, Pra-Suhien F.R.: one, Feb 1992; two, Mar 1993; two, Oct 1993. (Uncommon resident, forest; near Cape Coast, Subri River F.R..)

Pycnonotidae

Crimiger barbatus Bearded Bulbul. Pra-Suhien F.R. (Abrafo), Apr 1993. (Not uncommon resident, forest, also gallery forest at coast near Winneba.)

C. calurus White-bearded Bulbul. Not uncommon resident, Kakum N.P., Brisco camp 1 and Abrafo. (Probably not uncommon resident, forest.)

Ixonotus guttatus Spotted Bulbul. Not uncommon resident of forest, flocks of 3-7, Kakum N.P. and Pra-Suhien F.R.. (Uncommon local resident, forest.)

Phyllastrephus icterinus Icterine Bulbul. Not uncommon resident in Kakum N.P. at Brisco camp 1 and Abrafo. (Few records, forest.)

Laniidae

Lanius collaris Fiscal. Very common around Cape Coast. Nesting Apr-Jun. (Not uncommon resident, mainly coastal thicket zone, Takoradi to Winneba. Breeds Cape Coast, Dec-Oct with peak possibly Jan.)

L. senator Woodchat. Uncommon PM. Around Brenu lagoon, Feb-Mar 1992. (Not uncommon PM, northern savanna. Only three records west of Accra.)

Turdidae

Phoenicurus phoenicurus Redstart. Mole N.P., one male, Mar 1993. (Not uncommon PM, open wooded savanna in north; sporadic Mole.)

Sylviidae

Eremomela pusilla Green-backed Eremomela. One record Central Region: Komenda, Sep 1993. Shai Hills N.P., Mar 1993. (Common resident, throughout Volta Region to Accra and Keta plains; absent Cape Coast.)

Macrosphenus concolor Olive Longbill. Uncommon, Kakum N.P., Mar 1993. (Uncommon resident, throughout forest zone.)

Muscicapidae

Muscicapa striata Spotted Flycatcher. Brenu lagoon and Komenda, Mar 1992; Cape Coast, Nov 1992. (Not uncommon PM; passage migrant at Cape Coast.)

M. aquatica Swamp Flycatcher. Not uncommon, Pra-Suhien F.R., Oct, Jun-Jul. (Uncommon local resident, riverine habitat in north.)

Alseonax cinereus Ashy Flycatcher. One record, Pra-Suhien F.R., Jul 1991. (Resident, forest edges and woodland savanna, probably uncommon.)

Batis senegalensis Senegal Puff-back Flycatcher. Not very common. Central Region: Brimsu dam, May 1991; Ankafu, Jun 1992. Mole N.P., Mar 1993. (Not uncommon resident; unrecorded in coastal thicket zone.)

Platysteira cyanea Scarlet-spectacled Wattle-eye. Common resident, woodland savannah, coastal areas and forest edges, all year. (Common resident south through Volta Region to Accra Plains, coastal mangroves and thicket.)

Paridae

Parus funereus Dusky Tit. One record, Kakum N.P. (Brisco), Mar 1993. (Rare resident, forest. Collected near Winneba, Sep 1861.)

Nectariniidae

Nectarinia fuliginosa Carmelite Sunbird. One record, mangroves west of Elmina, Oct 1991. (Rare, no recent records.)

N. superba Superb Sunbird. Common resident of woodland savanna and gardens around Cape Coast. (Not uncommon resident; occasional Cape Coast.)

Estrildidae

Pirenestes ostrinus Black-bellied Seed-cracker. Common resident of forest in swampy areas, Pra-Suhien F.R. and Kakum N.P.; nesting colony in association with Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens* in Pra-Suhien. One record near Komenda. (Not uncommon resident, forest and edges, often near water.)

Nigrita bicolor Chestnut-breasted Negro-Finch. Resident forest and forest edge. Nesting in Pra-Suhien F.R. (Abrafo), Jun 1992. (Not uncommon resident, forest and edges.)

N. fusconata White-breasted Negro-Finch. One record, Kakum N.P., Nov 1991. (Uncommon resident, forest.)

Ploceidae

Amblyospiza albifrons Grosbeak Weaver. Only two records in Central Region: five, Cape Coast, May 1991; one near Komenda, Sep 1993. Also 30, Sekyere-Heman (Western Region, close to border of Central), Mar 1993. (Locally not uncommon, seasonal; Cape Coast region, Jun to late Sep, exceptionally one on 25 Mar.)

Ploceus aurantius Orange Weaver. Uncommon. Nesting colony on a small artificial pond, 10 km north of Cape Coast (on road to Twifo Praso) in association with Village Weaver *P. cucullatus*, Sep 1993. (Rare resident, mangroves and coastal vegetation, Axim to Cape Coast.)

P. tricolor Yellow-mantled Weaver. Uncommon resident, forest, Kakum N.P. and Pra-Suhien F.R.. Some records in Mar around Dunkwa on Offin river. (Not uncommon resident, widespread in forest edges but rare Cape Coast.)

P. preussi Golden-backed Weaver. One certain record, Kakum N.P. near Abrafo, two birds, Feb 1992. (No records near coast.)

Sturnidae

Onychognathus fulgidus Chestnut-winged Starling. Not very common. Sekyere-Heman and Kakum N.P., 2 Mar 1993. (Not uncommon resident, forest, including Subri River F.R.)

Poeoptera lugubris Narrow-tailed Starling. One record, Sekyere-Heman (Pra river), Mar 1992. (Rare resident, forest zone.)

Dicruridae

Dicrurus adsimilis Glossy-backed Drongo. Not very common. Feeding young in Birriwa, Oct 1991. (Common resident woodland savanna south to Volta region.)

D. atripennis Shining Drongo. Common resident of forest, Pra-Suhien F.R., Kakum N.P. and Subri F.R. (Rare resident, forest.)

Corvidae

Ptilostomus afer Piapiac. Not uncommon, vagrant, often seen around Cape Coast May-Jul, Oct. (Locally common resident, woodland savanna in north; also through Volta Region to eastern border of Accra and Keta Plains.)

Reference

- GRIMES, L.G. (1987) *The Birds of Ghana*. Check-list 9, British Ornithologists' Union, London.