



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



**Join the WAOS and support
the future availability of free
pdfs on this website.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm>

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.
If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

**Devenez membre de la
SOOA et soutenez la
disponibilité future des pdfs
gratuits sur ce site.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm>

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.
Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante
(2) pour économiser du papier.

NOTES ON THE LANNER *FALCO BIARMICUS* FROM TENERE DESERT, WITH COMMENTS ON THE INCIDENCE OF SCORPION PREDATION BY RAPTORS - The Lanner is a fairly common and widespread inhabitant of the arid and sub-arid habitats of West Africa. In Chad and in Niger, it frequents the rocky, saharan-massif terrain of the Ennedi, Tibesti and Air Mountains. During a visit to the Air and Ténéré Desert in March 1979, a pair of Lanners was observed in the vicinity of Jikara (19°10'N, 09°58'E), a small, isolated outcrop some 40 km east of the Air massif. Jikara is about 15 m high and is completely surrounded by open, sandy-desert habitat (Erg Brusset). It is situated in a zone where, if it occurs at all, rainfall amounts to no more than a few millimeters annually.

A nest containing 3 eggs was discovered on top of the outcrop, and beside it was a considerable amount of bone and feathers and a large number of regurgitated pellets. The remains of a Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), a Rock Dove (*Columba livia*) and an unidentified passerine were found amongst the bones and feathers. The pellets contained the remains of gerbils (*Gerbillus* sp.); a jerboa (*Jaculus jaculus*); several birds of which one was probably a lark; scales and teeth of several lizards; part of a skull, the scales and ribs of a small snake; mandibles from a number of Camel Spiders (*Galeodes* sp.); beetle sclerites, and perhaps most surprisingly of all, the remains of at least a dozen scorpions. These latter were identified by parts of the exo-skeleton, especially the unmistakable claws and 'sting'.

It is not surprising that the Lanners' diet consisted of somewhat atypical food-items. In central Chad, birds were the Lanner's principal prey (Newby 1979), and in the Ténéré Desert resident bird species are rare; those that do occur (*Otis arabs*, *Oenanthe leucopyga*, *Alaemon alaudipes*, *Columba livia*, *Ammomanes cincturus* and *A. deserti*) are only infrequent visitors. It is very likely that most species frequenting the area around Jikara would be palaeartic migrants on passage. (During a brief stay in the area, a number of palaeartics were seen: *S. turtur*, *Hirundo rustica*, *Motacilla flava* and some larks, probably *Calandrella brachydactyla*.)

The discovery of scorpions in the Lanner's diet has since led to a close scrutiny of other raptors' pellets. Although the study is far from conclusive, scorpion predation does appear to be a fairly widespread phenomenon, at least in the more arid regions of Niger where either scorpions are common or alternative prey species less available. So far, scorpion remains have been identified from pellets of the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), Desert Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), African Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and White-faced Scop's Owl (*Otus leucotis*). How these birds cope with the possibility of being stung during prey-capture, or in the subsequent digestion process, is far from clear. Another interesting point is raised when one considers that besides the scorpions, other items in the Lanner's diet, for example the Camel Spiders and geckos, are predominantly nocturnal. That also applies to the small mammal prey. Hopefully, subsequent research will shed some light on these enigmatic problems.

J.E. Newby

Direction des Eaux et Rêts, B.P. 578, Niamey, Niger