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Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Reichenbach's Sunbird *Anabathmis reichenbachii* a new Benin record, and other interesting coastal observations

The Republic of Benin has not been surveyed for avifauna as well as its neighbouring countries. A total of 423 birds have been recorded from Benin (112,622 km²; Dowsett 1993) compared to 625 (Check & Walsh 1996) for Togo, its smaller neighbour (56,785 km²) with almost identical habitat zones, in part because Benin lacked resident ornithologists until the last 20 years.

I observed the following species during a U.S. military humanitarian mission to Cotonou and Ouidah, Benin, 2–17 September 2006.

***Falco naumanni* Lesser Kestrel.** I observed one individual in flight just outside the entrance to the Forest of Krath in the town of Ouidah, on the afternoon of 10 Sep. In flight, it seemed the size of a large dove or pigeon, with the tapered wing of a falcon. It had clean whitish wings with a little spotting and no barring, as viewed from below. The body was contrastingly darker, and the tail was long and somewhat rounded. The habitat was mostly open with large scattered tree clumps on the outskirts of habitations and cultivated land. I also observed two more individuals, one male and one of unidentified gender, perched in a stand of tall trees and in flight at the military base at the international airport in Cotonou, 13 Sep. I first saw the male perched and again noted the small size, reminiscent of American Kestrel *F. sparverius*, which is much smaller than Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*. I watched it fly from the tree and again noticed the falcon wing profile, underpart coloration, grey cap, rufous chest and belly, and the grey, rounded tail with black horizontal band. The tips of the underwings were black. I saw another bird perched or flying near this male several times in the next hour, which was the same size, similar in colour, and seemed to communicate with the male.

During the same period, I saw at least three Common Kestrels, which were significantly larger and darker underneath, with barred or streaked wings and chest. They also had distinctly square tails versus the more rounded Lesser Kestrel tail.

All published records of Lesser Kestrels in Benin are from the north. They are not uncommon in Park W from January to March (Koster & Grettenberger 1983). Green & Sayer (1979) recorded them from December to April in the Pendjari and Arli National Parks. Lesser Kestrels have not been recorded in Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996), but are uncommon in N Nigeria according to Elgood *et al.* (1994).

***Columba guinea* Speckled Pigeon.** I observed one individual in Cotonou on a rooftop adjacent to the Chant d'Oiseau convent on 6 Sep. From about 20 m, it was obvious that the bird was a dove with unique reddish patterns. The large red circular patches

were quite distinct through binoculars, the neck exhibited numerous vertical reddish streaks, and the wings were also red with white spots. This species has been reported extensively in the north (Green & Sayer 1979, Koster & Grettenberger 1983, Borrow & Demey 2004), but only rarely in S Benin (Bouet 1914, Brunel 1958).

***Anthreptes gabonicus* Brown Sunbird.** I observed half a dozen or more individuals, usually solitary, on several occasions throughout the two-week period at La Casa del Papa Hotel on the coast, 5 km west of the old slave port in Ouidah. I first viewed a few individuals on independent occasions in coconut palms *Cocos nucifera* on the hotel grounds adjacent to a large mangrove lagoon. The small brownish silhouette resembled a warbler, with the white eye-ring boldly standing out against the drab brown of the bird's back. The black beak was thin, longer than a warbler beak and slightly bent. I subsequently observed other individuals from a kayak in mangroves along the shoreline, also in the Casa del Papa vicinity, and took several photographs. Sinsin (1995) reported Brown Sunbirds in the Lama Forest in S Benin. They are common on the coast of Nigeria in mangrove habitat (Elgood *et al.* 1994), but no records exist for Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996).

***Anabathmis reichenbachii* Reichenbach's Sunbird.** I observed one adult male in a coconut palm at a beef and coconut farm on the outskirts of Ouidah, 11 Sep. It was a large sunbird with a vivid iridescent blue head and a comparatively drab olive-green back. The bill was black, thin and sickle-shaped. Reichenbach's Sunbird has not been previously recorded in Benin, although it is uncommon in neighbouring Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994) and was most likely observed by Millet-Horsin (1924) in coastal Togo, near Anecho.

***Ploceus aurantius* Orange Weaver.** I observed and photographed from a kayak a small colony of both sexes in a patch of mangrove trees, late in the afternoon on 11 Sep. The colony was hidden in a large lagoon away from the shoreline *c.* 0.5 km from La Casa del Papa Hotel. It contained half a dozen or more nests. The male had a distinctly clean and rather bright orange head, with only a thin stripe of black running from the beak to the eye. The body was a dull green with some yellow underneath. All other male weavers in the area had far more black on their faces and body. The nest had a short, tube-like opening which looked almost cut off at the top. The Orange Weaver nest was the only choice on the weaver nest plate in Borrow & Demey (2004) that matched. Millet-Horsin (1924) reported Orange Weavers as common in mangrove habitat at Anecho in nearby Togo, but Benin records include spring sightings only on the Ouémé River in the northwest (P.M. Claffey pers. comm.).

Brown Sunbirds and Orange Weavers have each been reported only once in Benin (Sinsin 1995, P.M. Claffey pers. comm.). Reichenbach's Sunbird is a new species for the country. These three species may be more common than previously thought. Their ranges extend along the coast of countries on either side (Borrow & Demey 2004) and Benin contains appropriate mangrove or coastal scrub habitat along the same linear belt. There are no published records of Lesser Kestrels in S Benin and Speckled

Pigeons have been recorded rarely in the south (Bouet 1914, Brunel 1958). These observations confirm a need for further surveys in Benin, suggested by Holyoak & Seddon (1989) and Dowsett (1993).

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