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FIRST RECORDS OF NIGHT HERONS (NYCTICORAX NYCTICORAX)

ON THE ISLAND OF EL HIERRO, CANARY ISLANDS.

On 1 April 1986 a moribund juvenile Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax was found at Playa de Tacoron (U.T.M. Grid Reference - 28RR0164) on the extreme south coast of the southernmost island Hierro, Canary Islands. The bird, which is now preserved in the collection of the Zoology Department of La Laguna University, gave the following biometric data: mass 600-700 g, bill 69.8 mm, wing 278 mm and tarsus 72.4 mm.

On the following day, a group of 15 individuals was seen at Montaña Los Humilladeros (1 284 m above sea level; U.T.M. 28RR9571). Finally, on the third April, the corpse of an adult Night Heron was found at La Dehesa (725 m above sea level; U.T.M. 28RR9370).

Night Herons have been observed on Tenerife (Bannerman 1963 Birds of the Atlantic Islands, Vol 1 Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh & London.) and also on Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and La Palma (Emmerson pers. comm.). The species is presumably mainly a passage migrant, though it appears that in some years a few individuals stay to winter in the easternmost islands of the Canary Archipelago.

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THE BIRDS OF MOUNT NIMBA, LIBERIA. 1986

Peter R. Colston and Kai Curry-Lindahl

With a section on the biogeographic content by Malcolm Coe.

British Museum (Natural History) 129 pp £17.50

ISBN 0-565-00982-6

Mount Nimba is an isolated mountain range shoved between the countries of Ivory Coast, Guinea and Liberia. It is located in the forest zone, some 170 km from the sea and rises to over 1700 m. As such it is unusual in West Africa; only Mount Cameroon, Fernando Lo (P Bioka) and the Loma massif of Sierra Leone reach higher. It is - or was - mainly forest covered but some of the highest parts support apparently natural savanna grassland. Mount Nimba is of enormous biological importance with a very high level of endemism in both its flora and fauna.

In recognition of this the Guinean and Ivorian parts of Mt. Nimba have long been maintained as nature reserves. Not so the Liberian side unfortunately - the discovery in 1955 of high grade iron ore led to the rapid opening up of the area. The resulting new town, roads and the mining operations themselves have resulted in an all too familiar and depressing tale of deforestation and habitat degradation. One of the authors of the present book, K. Curry-Lindahl aware of the need for biological studies in Liberian Nimba before they were too late was instrumental in establishing the Nimba Research Laboratory which operated from 1963-1982. Part of the laboratory's research programme was an investigation of the avifauna of

Liberian Nimba. These were begun in 1967 by Alec Forbes-Watson and continued at intervals over the next twelve years by him, K. Curry-Lindahl, Malcolm Coe and others. It is the results of these investigations that are presented in this book.

The introductory sections include the recent history of the area, climate, vegetation and habitat types and a brief survey of studies of the other vertebrate groups of the area. There follows an outline of the evolutionary history of forest biomes in Africa and how this relates to speciation and levels of endemisms, which leads into a discussion of the composition of the avifauna of Nimba and how it compares to other relevant parts of the continent. Tables listing birds recorded new to Liberia from this study (117 species) and the significant range extensions that some of these represent, are provided.

There is an attractive colour plate by Philip Burton depicting for the first time the two new species (previously described elsewhere) that were discovered during the course of the field work - Melaenornis arnamarulae and Melignomon eisentrauti.

The latter species is also the subject of one of three photographs of birds reproduced in colour. The second depicts what is labelled as a Lemon dove, Aplopelia larvata, but which looks worryingly like a Blue-spotted wood-dove, Turtur afer.

The meat of the book however is the systematic accounts of the 385 species of bird recorded from and around Nimba. These are treated annotated checklist fashion, with information given, where available, under standardised headings. Peter Colston has been responsible for the sections on specimens (biometric data is provided in an appendix), stomach contents, annual breeding cycle, geographical variation and status and distribution, while Kai Curry-Lindahl has contributed the sections on habits, migration and field notes. One new subspecies is described Muscicapa olivascens nimbae which represents an important range extension westwards. The species was previously known no further west than Ghana, although it has since been recorded from Ivory Coast. This section is well illustrated with photographs of vegetation and habitat types (slightly out of place here) and with numerous line drawings for which no artist is acknowledged. These latter are variable in standard, some are convincing, others decidedly less so. It is also unfortunate that the one chosen to illustrate the book's front cover, appears in this section under the name "White-beared Bulbul" and not White-bearded. The book's main limitation, as the author's themselves acknowledge is the lack of Forbes-Watson's participation in it - even much of his field data and notes being unavailable to them. This is a great shame and is responsible for giving the systematic section an unbalanced feel as well as denying the reader the benefit of field observations etc. of often poorly-known species. This aside, overall the authors and the BMNH have produced an attractive and worthwhile publication which deals with a relatively poorly documented part of the continent. Should the book stimulate further interest and publicity for the area perhaps it may help the cause of conservation in Liberian Nimba - currently without any protection. As some of the photographs in this book show the need is very urgent.