



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



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RECORDS OF ROCK THRUSH MONTICOLA SAXATILIS IN THE GAMBIA -

The occurrence of the Blue Rock Thrush Monticola solitarius and Rock Thrush Monticola saxatilis in the Senegambia has recently been treated by G.J. Morel et al. (1983 Malimbus 5 : 1-4). About the Rock Thrush in The Gambia it is stated: "...En Gambie, la seule observation serait celle de Reichenow (1904), rapportée par Marche et Compiègne (in Gore 1981). Il ne semble pas y avoir d'autres observations en Gambie: la phrase de Jensen et Kirkeby (1980) "Rare Palearctic passage migrant and winter visitor 13 December - 21 March apparently throughout The Gambia" doit être prise dans un sens général plutôt que comme conclusion d'observations précises." We would like to make a comment to this statement.

When we wrote our book (The Birds of The Gambia, 1980 Aros Nature Guide, Aarhus) we based our treatment of the Rock Thrush upon 7 recent records:

- Two birds on December 31, 1972 at Atlantic Road, Cape St. Mary (B. Christophersen).
- One bird on December 13, 1973 at Fula Banting (J. Kirkeby, J.V. Jensen).
- One bird on February 13, 1974 at Kabafita (O. Laessøe).
- One bird on February 14, 1974 between Yundum and Brumen Bridge (O. Laessøe).
- One bird on February 22, 1974 at Bakau (O. Laessøe).
- One bird on February 23, 1974 at Kabafita (O. Laessøe).
- One bird on March 21, 1975 at Tabanani (L.S. Nielsen, J. Kirkeby, J.V. Jensen).

All the above observers were familiar with the species, both in Europe and in its winter quarters in the East African savanna. They were also aware of its rarity in The Gambia. Mr. Laessøe and Mr. Kirkeby have been Hon. Members of The Danish Ornithological Society's Rarities Committee. Reports which included these records of Rock Thrush were submitted to The Gambia Ornithological Society by us in the summer of 1975.

Based upon so few records it might be a bold assertion to write that the Rock Thrush is a rare Palearctic migrant and winter visitor to The Gambia. However, we tried to evaluate the status and distribution of all species for which we had 6 records or more. Only for "Vagrant" species with 5 records or less did we give all records in full. Thus when we wrote "Rare....." this meant that we accepted 6 or more records of that species.

The comment by Morel et al. may be due to our categorization (c.f. Jensen & Kirkeby p. 22) being overlooked or because it was based on the treatment of the Rock Thrush in Gore (Birds of The Gambia, 1981 B.O.U., London). Gore wrote that: "The only record is one specimen Bathurst (now Banjul) reported by Reichenow (1904) on the authority of Marche & Compiègne. (Bannerman has records from Casamance and Guinea-Bissau.)". Either Gore was not aware of our seven records of Rock Thrush or he rejected them.

Comparison of the checklist of Gore with that of Jensen & Kirkeby reveals a number of discrepancies as to the status and distribution of a number of species. Jensen & Kirkeby was compiled primarily from observations by European visitors to The Gambia and only secondarily by residents there, whereas the reverse was the case for Gore. Gore was the more recent of the two checklists and accepted some records in Jensen & Kirkeby but rejected others.

For all the rarer species in Jensen & Kirkeby's checklist, except records already published in The Gambia Ornithological Society Quarterly Newsletter or in The Gambia Ornithological Society's annual reports, questionnaires were sent to observers for further details about their identifications. The majority of observers provided material as requested in the form of descriptions, photos, tape-recordings etc. As a result of this correspondence some records were accepted and others put in brackets or omitted. Despite this verification procedure, and because of the lack of a West African Rarities Committee, records in Jensen & Kirkeby were based mainly upon the observers' own judgement which may have resulted in a less stringent selection of records in the checklist of Jensen & Kirkeby compared to Gore's.

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GORE REPLIES - It is more than ten years since I began compiling Birds of The Gambia (1981, BOU Checklist No. 3) and I do not have my papers to hand, so I am having to work from memory regarding Jensen & Kirkeby's short communication above.

When BOU Checklist No. 3 was in final proof and about to go for printing, much to my surprise and that of The Gambia Ornithological Society, Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) was published. There was no time to enter into correspondence with the authors about the new records which appeared in their book and I therefore had to make an arbitrary decision as to which of their records to accept, which to place in square brackets and which to reject.

I accepted a number of records, most Palaearctic migrants which were credited to named European ornithologists who were known to me; I placed a few, mostly African, species which I considered to be "probables" in square brackets; and I rejected a number of records which were of doubtful veracity or which had already been rejected by The Gambia Ornithological Society.

Their comment that the Rock Thrush Monticola saxatilis was "a rare Palaearctic passage migrant and winter visitor 13 December-21 March apparently throughout The Gambia" did not tally with the experience of resident ornithologists known to me in The Gambia during the 1970's. In the circumstances I had no option but to reject their statement.

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