



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



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Sir,

TWO COMMENTS ON 'THE BIRDS OF SOKOTO'

I read with great interest the account of bird life in Sokoto recently published in the Bulletin by Messrs. Mundy & Cook.

In Part 1 (Bull. Nigerian Orn.Soc. 9(35): 26-47), writing of Neem Azadirachta indica plantations, they point out the poor representation of bacteria, insects and birds in such habitats. This is explained as a result of the recent introduction of Neem and the lack of ecological adaptation by indigenous species. It is suggested that this habitat is bound to change.

The Neem has long been famed in India for its medicinal properties and its value as a mulching plant (H.F.MacMillan, 'Tropical Planting and Gardening', 5th ed., 1935). Recently it has been found that a suspension of crushed seeds or leaves, when applied to plant foliage, will deter some insect species from feeding. The compound Azadirachtin which has been isolated from Neem seeds has been found to be a strong feeding deterrent for the desert locust Schistocerca gregaria (Morgan, Gill & Lewis 1972, Ceres 5: 60). It is probably this compound which accounts for the value of the leaves for mulching and which also largely explains the paucity of life in Neem plantations, rather than the fact that Neem is exotic in West Africa. It is unlikely that this situation is capable of change except over a very long period of time. This chemical property of Neem adds to the interest of any observations on animals eating Neem products. I have so far seen only the Common Bulbul Pycnonotus barbatus, the African Golden Oriole Oriolus auratus and the Blue Rock Thrush Monticola solitarius eating the fruit. I should be interested to hear of other observations.

In Part 3 (Bulletin 10(37): 1-28), Mundy & Cook gave data on the breeding of the Long-tailed Shag Phalacrocorax africanus in Sokoto during late August and September. This they consider to be the second record for Nigeria and the fifth for West Africa. However they (in common with Elgood, Fry & Dowsett 1973, Ibis 115: 1-45) have overlooked records of two colonies on the River Niger. Wells & Walsh (Bulletin 6(21): 1-25) reported two colonies, one at Libate village and the other at Warra village, both on the left bank of the river more or less opposite Old Bussa before the formation of the Kainji Lake. At both of these villages Long-tailed Shags were present at their nests from September to February in 1966 and 1967. They were associated with breeding Black-headed Herons Ardea melanocephala and Great White Herons Egretta alba. Unfortunately I no longer have my field notes for this period but at least 17 pairs of Long-tailed Shags were nesting at the Warra colony on one occasion (data from photographs).

In addition to these records I have unpublished records of two colonies of about a dozen nests found on 26 December 1968. The nests were in dying trees standing in the newly-formed Lake Kainji in the region of the Swashi River outfall (just north of Shagunu, 10° 20' N). A Darter Anhinga rufa was sitting in each colony. At about the same time Dr R.W.Ashford told me of several other colonies in the southern portion of the lake.

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