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MONTANE BIRDS OF NIGERIA

by J.H.Elgood

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The addition of over 40 new bird species to the Nigerian list in just over ten years, reported by Elgood (1975), prompts the question as to how many additional species may be expected. Almost all recent additions fall into one of four categories :-

- (1) Marine species, waders, skuas and gulls, whose addition can be attributed to more skilled observation at coastal stations such as Lagos;
- (2) Palaearctic migrants, mainly passerines whose presence within Nigeria has been revealed by a more intensive use of mist-nets, particularly in the north;
- (3) Ethiopian species formerly known east and west of Nigeria, for which a Nigerian record has shown that an apparently discontinuous distribution is erroneous;
- (4) Montane Ethiopian species, recently shown to range west into Nigeria to such upland areas as the Obudu and Mambila Plateaux.

Although the last group is the smallest, it would seem to be rather easier to forecast further likely additions to this category than to the others. This article therefore surveys the known montane birds of western Africa to enquire what new birds should be looked for by ornithologists who have the opportunity to visit the high plateaux of Nigeria's eastern border. Likely additional passerines have been sought by scrutiny of the distribution maps of Hall & Moreau (1970) while non-passerines have been sought in White (1965) although only a few groups, of rather smaller birds, have species restricted to montane habitats.

The ecological reasons for the restriction of so many species to upland habitats are obscure but most authorities agree (e.g. Moreau 1966) that altitudes above about 1400 m support species peculiar to such areas which consequently tend to have geographically isolated populations, some of which have been separated long enough to show taxonomic differentiation as distinct subspecies in the different montane areas.

Within Nigeria most of the Jos Plateau does not exceed 1400 m and in any case the area is greatly disturbed by human activities. It is therefore not surprising that only two birds call for comment from this area, both being essentially restricted to it. These are the Adamawa Turtle-Dove Streptopelia lugens hypopyrrha ranging east into Cameroun and having other races in mountainous areas in east Africa and the Yemen;

and the Jos Long-billed Pipit Anthus similis josensis, a race of a wide-spread and highly differentiated species with josensis known only from the Jos Plateau (R.E.Sharland) and the race bannermani occurring on the Obudu Plateau and extending widely through African highlands (Table 2). The Jos Plateau has been fairly well explored ornithologically and therefore is relatively unlikely to produce species new to Nigeria.

By contrast, montane areas of the eastern borders of Nigeria, such as the Obudu and Mambila Plateaux, are much more likely to produce new records. Table 1 lists species that should be looked for in these eastern highlands, with my own estimation of their likelihood of occurrence.

Table 1. Prospective new Nigerian montane birds

	Adjacent occurrences	Likelihood in Nigeria
<u>Francolinus camerunensis</u>	Confined to Mt Cameroun	Unlikely
<u>Aplopelia larvata</u>	Cameroun, Fernando Po	Very likely
<u>Tauraco bannermani</u>	Bamenda area	Quite likely
<u>Malaconotus kupeensis</u>	Kupe Mt only	Unlikely
<u>Turdus sp.*</u>		
<u>Alcippe abyssinica</u>	Cameroun, Fernando Po	Very likely
<u>Bradypterus barratti</u>	Cameroun, Fernando Po	Very likely
<u>Cisticola robusta</u>	Bamenda area	Quite likely
<u>Apalis sharpei</u>	Cameroun, Zaire, Sierra Leone	Very likely
<u>Apalis pulchra</u>	Cameroun	Quite likely
<u>Muscicapa adusta</u>	Cameroun, Fernando Po	Very likely
<u>Platysteira peltata</u>	Cameroun	Quite likely
<u>Nectarinia ursulae</u>	Cameroun, Fernando Po	Very likely

* The taxonomy of West African thrushes is in considerable confusion, with White, Bannerman and Mackworth-Praed & Grant all assigning the Kurrichane Thrush to different species : T. pelios, T. libyanus and T. olivaceus respectively. In addition there is a montane thrush, T. abyssinicus in White's nomenclature with a race nigrilorum on Mt Cameroun and another poensis on Fernando Po. Thus if a race of this should be found at Obudu or elsewhere in Nigeria it would constitute an additional species in White's classification.

The view is taken that species long enough established in western Africa to have reached Fernando Po, even if below 1400 m there, are very likely also to occur in Nigeria. Those species found in Cameroun highlands alone are regarded as unlikely within Nigeria if their known range is very limited (unless very adjacent to Nigeria), but more likely to be found to occur in Nigeria if fairly widespread in Cameroun highlands.

To bring the 12 species in Table 1 more into perspective Table 2 has been prepared to show the total complement of West African species that can be regarded as montane together with their known occurrences at a range of West African loci and, where applicable, in East Africa also. Some of these species are not confined to montane habitats in other areas but nevertheless seem to be restricted to montane habitats at least in Cameroun and Nigeria. This point is well illustrated by the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*, a lowland bird in Europe but strictly montane in West Africa. Several other species occur in lowlands in other parts of Africa. Sight records are shown in parenthesis, and here a further 11 species (denoted by an asterisk) lack full confirmation for Nigeria. It is hoped that before the Check-List is finalised observers visiting the eastern high plateaux of Nigeria will be able to furnish skin, mist-net or well authenticated photographic records of some of these birds.

In conclusion, it would seem that no more than ten or 12 additional montane species are likely to be added to the Nigerian list, but an equal number require proper confirmation so that the eastern plateaux are clearly well worth continued ornithological investigation.

Table 2. Montane birds of West Africa

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Mt Cameroun	Cam. highlands	Fernando Po	Oudu plateau	Mambila plateau	Jos plateau	elsewhere W.Afr.	E.Afr. Highlands
(<i>Francolinus camerunensis</i>)	+							
* <i>Columba arquatrix</i>		+	+	(+)				+
<i>Streptopelia lugens</i>		+				+		+
(<i>Aplopelia larvata</i>)	+	+	+					
(<i>Tauraco bannermani</i>)		+						
<i>Apus aequatorialis</i>		+				?	+	
<i>Apus barbatus</i>			+	+				+
<i>Apaloderma vittatum</i>		+	+	+				
<i>Merops variegatus</i>		+		(+)	+			
<i>Pogoniulus coryphaeus</i>	+	+		+				also lowlands
<i>Jynx ruficollis</i>					+			+
<i>Campethera tullbergi</i>	+	+	+	+				also lowlands
<i>Mesopicus elliottii</i>	+	+	+	+				
* <i>Psalidoprocne fuliginosa</i>	+	(+)	+	(+)				also lowlands
<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	+	+		+	+	?	+	also lowlands
<i>Anthus similis</i>	+	+		+		+	+	+
* <i>Motacilla clara</i>	+	+		(+)			+	+

<i>Coccyzus</i>	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Campothera caesia	+	+	+	+				+
Andropadus montanus	+	+	+	+			+	
Andropadus tephrolaemus	+	+	+	+			+	+ down to 700 m
Phyllastrephus flavostriatus	+	+		+				
Phyllastrephus poensis	+	+	+	+				+
Laniarius atroflavus	+	+		+	+			
Laniarius poensis	+	+	+	+				+
Malaconotus gladiator	+	+		+				
(Malaconotus kupeensis)		+						
*Onychognathus walleri	+	+	+	(+)				
Saxicola torquata	+	+	+	+	+		+	{ lowlands out-
Cossypha bocagei	+	+	+	+				{ side Africa
Cossypha isabellae	+	+		+				
Cossypha roberti	+	+	+	+				
(Turdus abyssinicus)	+		+	?				
(Alcippe abyssinica)	+	+	+					
Trichastoma poliothorax	+	+	+	+				
Lioptilus gilberti	+	+		+				
Bradypterus cinnamomeus	+	+		+				+
(Bradypterus barratti)	+	+	+					+
Schoenicola platyura	?	+			+		+	+ also lowlands
Phylloscopus herberti	+	+	+	+				
(Cisticola robusta)		+						+ also lowlands
*Cisticola hunteri	+	+		(+)				+
Prinia epichlora	+	+	+	+				
(Apalis pulchra)		+			+			+
(Apalis sharpii)		+					+	+ also lowlands
Apalis cinerea	+	+	+	+				+
Camaroptera lopezi	+	+	+	+				
(Muscicapa adusta)	+	+	+	+				+
(Platysteira peltata)	+	+						+ also lowlands
Trochocercus albiventris	+	+	+	+				+
(Nectarinia ursulae)	+	+	+					
Nectarinia bouvieri		+	+	+	+			+ also lowlands
Nectarinia preussi	+	+	+	+	+			+
Nectarinia oritis	+	+	+	+				
Linurgus olivaceus	+	+	+	(+)				+
Ploceus baglafecht		+			+			
Ploceus insignis	+	+	+	+				
*Ploceus bannermani		+		(+)	+			
Ploceus bicolor	+	+	+	+				+
*Euplectes capensis	+	+		(+)				+
*Nesocharis shelleyi	+	+	+	(+)				
Clytospiza montelii					+			+
Clytospiza dybowskii					(+)	+	+	+
Cryptospiza reichenowii	+	+	+	+				
Estrilda nunnula	+	+	+	+	+			
Total : 64 species	46	58	36	44	8	3	10	32
Percent :	72	91	56	69	12.5	5	16	50