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LESSER YELLOWLEGS AT LAGOS:A SPECIES NEW TO NIGERIA.

During the late afternoon of 15th February 1969, I explored the lagoon/swamp complex of Iganmu and Ijora, Lagos. Many Palaearctic waders were present and thirteen species were identified, notably Spotted Redshanks Tringa erythropus (58) and a Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii. Judged by earlier records in the month a considerable influx of birds had just taken place. Even so I was totally unprepared to discover in company with some Wood Sandpipers Tringa ~~flavipes~~ reola on a channel edge a not dissimilar but larger bird with long, bright orange-yellow legs. Viewed from ca. 20 yards and in bright sunlight, it appeared to be a Lesser Yellowlegs Tringa flavipes. After five minutes of close scrutiny I was convinced that it was not a freak Wood Sandpiper but determined to make sure I flushed it. The flight pattern was similar to that of a Wood Sandpiper, with a dark back and barred tail outlining a square white rump and totally dark blackish-ended wings. The bird flew off some 40 yards and then landed on open mud. There it was possible to compare it with Spotted Redshanks and Marsh Sandpipers Tringa stagnatilis. It was clearly different from and just larger than the latter. The legs continued to look bright yellow and it was clear that it was indeed a Lesser Yellowlegs, the first for Nigeria and Africa.

A detailed description of the bird, based on field sketches and notes follows:

Bill: rather short (about length of head), fine, straight and dark.

Head: brownish-olive (looking greyish at some angles), marked with prominent white supercilia (from just behind eye to bill), some darker feathers bordering supercilia and ear coverts, latter flecked white.

Upper

Parts: hind neck and mantle brownish-olive (looking greyish at some angles), faintly marked but appearing uniform; tertials and wing coverts as mantle but darker (shading into blackish primaries when folded); lower back dark (olive); rump square and white (contrasting markedly with lower back); tail white with several bars (darkest towards tips) flight feathers, secondaries as coverts, primaries blackish (as primary coverts) and forming dark ended wing pattern.

Under

Parts: throat white; foreneck whitish flecked with greyish marks, forming a well marked gorgette on breast; all rest white.

Legs

& Feet: bright (cadmium) yellow.

The bird was present again on the 16th February (at ca. 18.00 hrs., when a tchu-tchu call was heard), 10th March (ca. 18.15 hrs., arriving), possibly on the 11th and again certainly on 18th March (ca. 18.00 hrs., coming in with no less than 375 Wood Sandpipers to roost, (calling again). By the 22nd March a considerable departure of waders was obvious and it appears that the bird had gone too.

There was no real evidence that the bird was present in the Ijora area during the day and since it was clearly associating with the abundant Wood Sandpipers it may have used several feeding grounds during its 30 day stay.

I have been familiar with the species since 1949 and saw many in Canada in 1956. A copy of sketches of this bird drawn on 15th February has been deposited with the Editor.