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Birds observed in Guinea-Bissau, January 1986, with a review of current ornithological knowledge of the country

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Summary

Little is known about the ornithology of Guinea-Bissau, particularly of the interior. In this paper I present bird observations made in coastal Guinea-Bissau, January 1986. Twenty-one species were observed that are not included in the most complete list of the country's birds. A short history of ornithological exploration in Guinea-Bissau is given, with a review of recent literature.

Résumé

Nos connaissances sur l'avifaune de la Guinée-Bissau, et surtout des régions de l'intérieur, sont lacunaires. Ce travail présente les observations effectuées sur les oiseaux côtiers en Guinée-Bissau en janvier 1986. Il mentionne l'observation de 21 espèces qui ne figurent pas sur la liste la plus complète de l'avifaune de ce pays. Il comprend aussi un bref historique des recherches ornithologiques en Guinée-Bissau.

Introduction

Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony, is a small, coastal country of 36,125 km², bordered by Senegal in the north and Guinea (Conakry) in the east and south. The western half of the country is dominated by large river systems and there is an offshore group of islands (the Bijagós archipelago) which is surrounded by extensive mudflats. The eastern parts mainly consist of dry savanna, with secondary and remnant primary forest to the south. The country is generally flat, the highest elevation — in the southeast — being only 262 m.

Little has been published about Guinea-Bissau's birds. The most complete species list (Frade & Bacelar 1955, 1959) was published many decades ago. These authors listed collected specimens only and did not include information on breeding, movements, distribution within the country, or other biological data.

The list of Dowsett (1993), who did not consult Frade & Bacelar (1959), is less complete: it contains only three species not included by Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) or in the present paper (Appendix 1).

During a short visit to Guinea-Bissau by ship, 15-23 Jan 1986, bird observations were made at eight localities, all near or on the coast. Due to other commitments, it was not possible to make systematic counts of all birds encountered. Nevertheless, and in view of the paucity of ornithological data from the country, it is thought worthwhile to present a systematic list of observations. In addition, the opportunity is taken to present an update on Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959).

Short history of ornithological exploration in Guinea-Bissau

Until the mid-1930s, the Portuguese did not succeed in "pacifying" much of the country and few Europeans penetrated the interior. Collecting during the 19th and early 20th centuries took place almost exclusively in the coastal districts, especially the surroundings of Bolama (the old capital) and Bissau. Many specimens collected during the mid-19th century originated from Beaudouin, a Frenchman who resided in Bissau for some time and worked for the Verreaux brothers in Paris. Many of his specimens were sold as trade skins and their locality was often given as "Casamance", which is in southwestern Senegal. It is thought, however, that a good proportion of these were in fact taken within the borders of present day Guinea-Bissau (see Bocage 1901, Frade 1950, Frade & Bacelar 1955).

Small collections, mainly from the Bolama and Bissau areas, reached European museums with some regularity during the second half of the 19th century (see Bocage 1867, 1871, 1876, 1880, 1892, Sharpe 1874). These were summarized in a list of all species known to occur up to that time by Bocage (1901). The great explorer Leonardo Fea, who worked the country in 1898-1900, was the first to collect widely away from the Bissau and Bolama areas, visiting both the north and the south of the country (see Salvadori 1901, also Fea 1900). In 1909, W.J. Ansorge stayed in the country for several months and collected for the London and Tring museums, but a comprehensive work on his collections was never published. The first large zoological collecting expeditions, covering much of the territory, were undertaken by A. Monard in 1937-1938 and the Portuguese *Missão Zoológica da Guiné* in 1945-1946. The ornithological results of these were presented by Monard (1940) and Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) respectively, the latter including all species known to have been collected up to that time (see also Frade *et al.* 1946, Frade 1949, 1950). A good collection of bird specimens was also made during the Portuguese *Missão Etnológica e Antropológica* in 1946-1947 (Madureira 1978, 1982).

During the 1960s, the Abbé R. de Naurois was the first to draw attention to the rich avifauna of the coastal areas and the Bijagós archipelago in particular (see

Naurois 1962, 1965, 1966, 1969, 1981). His papers remain the only studies on the breeding biology of birds in Guinea-Bissau. During the 1980s, there have been several surveys aimed at establishing the numbers of wintering waders in Guinea-Bissau, mainly through expeditions organized by the Dutch Working Group for International Wader and Waterfowl Research (WIWO). This has resulted in a steady flow of articles and reports, emphasizing the great importance of the mudflats, mangroves and rice fields of Guinea-Bissau for wintering Palaearctic migrants, particularly waders (*e.g.* Altenburg & van der Kamp 1985, 1986, Zwarts 1985, 1988, Altenburg & van Spanje 1989, Wymenga *et al.* 1990, Altenburg *et al.* 1992, Salvig *et al.* 1994). Recently, the Cufada area (Quinara region), which includes a Ramsar site, has been proposed as a National Park (Araújo 1994). Since the works of Monard (1940), Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) and Madureira (1978, 1982) — which dealt with collections made in the 1930s and 1940s — virtually nothing has been published on areas other than wetlands, and the interior of the country remains largely unexplored. An ornithological bibliography of Guinea-Bissau has recently been published (Hazevoet 1995).

Description of study sites

Observations were made at the following localities (see Fig. 1):

15-16 Jan. Town and harbour of the capital city of Bissau. A large roost of waterbirds is situated at Ilhéu dos Pássaros in Rio Gêba, a few kilometres to the east of Bissau (see Naurois 1969, Altenburg *et al.* 1992). At dusk, eastward movement of many waterbirds was observed along the harbour front.

16 Jan. Dry savanna and rice fields, 48 km northeast of Safim along the road to Nhacra.

17 Jan. Ilha de Bolama. Much of the island is cultivated and there are large oil palm plantations, but along the fringe are some remnant marshes and secondary forest.

18 Jan. Eastern shore of Canal do Porto, between Ilha de Bolama and the mainland. The channel is mainly bordered by secondary forest.

19-20 Jan. Ilha de Bubaque; extensive oil palm plantations with patches of secondary forest.

20-21 Jan. Ilha de Rubane; oil palm plantations and secondary growth.

21-22 Jan. Ilha Roxa (also known as Ilha de Canhabaque); oil palm plantations but with larger stretches of secondary forest than on Ilha de Bubaque.

22 Jan. Ilhéu dos Porcos, a small uninhabited island just north of Ilha Roxa; mainly secondary growth and some oil palms.

The shores of the islands consist of sandy beaches, rocky coasts, and mangrove swamps. For a detailed account of the geography and vegetation of the areas visited, see Naurois (1969).

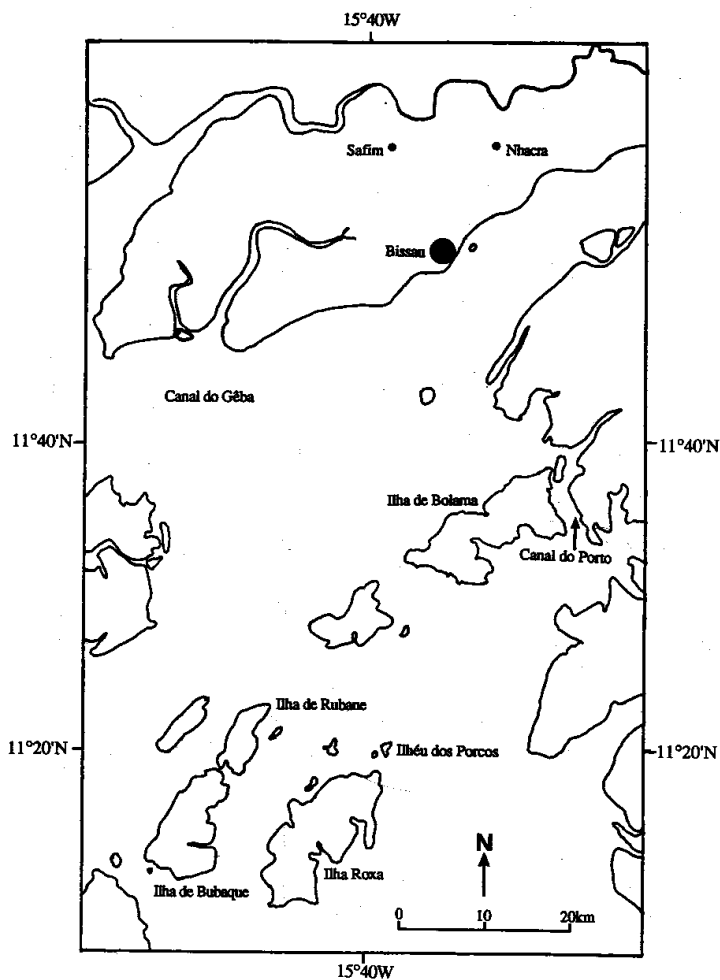


Figure 1. Map of the area visited, showing localities mentioned in the text.

Systematic list

The present list of species observed by me, includes 21 species not mentioned by Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959), but 20 of these have also been reported by other authors since. Additional references on species not included by Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) are given, while 72 species not included by these authors nor observed in Jan 1986, but which have been reported elsewhere, are listed in Appendix 2. Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) included 344 species. With additional records published since (including the present paper), the grand total of bird species observed in Guinea-Bissau now stands at 437 (excluding 13 species listed in Appendix 1; but see Rodwell 1996 for further additions to this total), although Dowsett (1993) listed only 319 species for the country. In comparison, the totals for the neighbouring Senegambia and Guinea are 626 and 606 respectively (Morel & Morel 1988, 1990, Demey 1995). Even allowing for divergent views of species limits, this indicates that, with growing ornithological knowledge, a considerable increase in the number of species reported from Guinea-Bissau is still to be expected.

Species not included in Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) are marked with an asterisk. Many of these species are now known to be common visitors. When records of the "new" species have also been published elsewhere, numbered references are given as follows: 1—Naurois (1966); 2—Naurois (1969); 3—Voous (1970); 4—Madureira (1978); 5—Poorter & Zwarts (1984); 6—Altenburg & van der Kamp (1986); 7—Altenburg *et al.* (1992); 8—Araújo (1994). See also Zwarts (1988) for further information on numbers and distribution of waders, although his records are also included by Altenburg *et al.* (1992) and are included below in reference 4; Salvig *et al.* (1994) provide further data on this group, but no new species. For information on the occurrence of terns, see Altenburg *et al.* (1992). As Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) are used as the starting point for this paper, no references are given in the species accounts to Dowsett (1993), except to point out some of the errors in the latter; his unreferenced data on ringing recoveries are not included, as they appear to contain many inaccuracies. There are many other errors in Dowsett's list, concerning species not dealt with in the present paper, especially as regards breeding codes. I have excluded species shown to occur in Guinea-Bissau on the distribution maps in Brown *et al.* (1982), Urban *et al.* (1986), Fry *et al.* (1988) and Keith *et al.* (1992) when no further details are given. Names and sequence of non-passeriformes follow Brown *et al.* (1982), Urban *et al.* (1986) and Fry *et al.* (1988); those of passeriformes follow Serle & Morel (1977).

Localities are abbreviated as follows: CG—Canal do Gêba; CP—Canal do Porto; IBol—Iilha de Bolama; IBub—Iilha de Bubaque; IP—Ilhêu dos Porcos; IRox—Iilha de Roxa; IRub—Iilha de Rubane; NES—northeast of Safim.

Sulidae

**Sula leucogaster* Brown Booby. Two observed offshore near CG. There is a

colony of c. 3000 pairs on Alcatraz islet, off Guinea, close to the border with Guinea-Bissau (Chételat 1938, Altenburg & van der Kamp 1989). Although the species may be presumed to be regular offshore, only few records have been published (1, 2, 3). Dowsett's (1993) "definite breeding" code is an error, based on a misinterpretation of Naurois (1966).

Phalacrocoracidae

Phalacrocorax africanus Long-tailed Cormorant. Several hundred flying towards a roost east of Bissau harbour; common around IBub.

Anhingidae

Anhinga rufa Darter. Two on IBol.

Pelecanidae

Pelecanus rufescens Pink-backed Pelican. Parties of 5-20: NES, along IBol, CP, IROx and IP.

Ardeidae

Bubulcus ibis Cattle Egret. Singles and small parties (<25) on IBub and IRub.

Egretta gularis Western Reef Heron. Widespread in small numbers at all localities visited.

E. garzetta Little Egret. Regularly observed and particularly common around Bissau; smaller numbers NES, on IBol and IP. Breeding data in Naurois (1969), *pace* Dowsett (1993).

E. intermedia Yellow-billed Egret. Small numbers (<10) at all localities visited.

Ardea cinerea Grey Heron. Small numbers (<5) at Bissau, NES and on IBol.

A. melanocephala Black-headed Heron. Two NES.

A. goliath Goliath Heron. One along CP, three on IBub, one on IRub, two on IROx.

Scopidae

Scopus umbretta Hamerkop. Two NES. Breeding data in Naurois (1969), *pace* Dowsett (1993).

Ciconiidae

Mycteria ibis Yellow-billed Stork. Five NES, two on IBol, two along CP. Breeding data in Naurois (1969), *pace* Dowsett (1993).

Ciconia episcopus White-necked Stork. Two on IBol.

Threskiornithidae

Bostrychia hagedash Hadada. Three on IBol, one on IROx, two on IP.

Threskiornis aethiopica Sacred Ibis. C. 50 flying towards a roost east of Bissau harbour, four NES, five on IBol, c. 25 on IBub, seven on IROx, three on IP.

Platalea alba African Spoonbill. Six NES.

Pandionidae

**Pandion haliaetus* Osprey. One along the shore of IROx. (5, 7, 8)

Accipitridae

Aviceda cuculoides Cuckoo Falcon. One on IBub.

Milvus migrans Black Kite. Up to 15 on IBub, IRub and IROx. All seen well enough were *M. m. parasitus*.

Haliaeetus vocifer Fish Eagle. Three on IBol, two adults and a juvenile along CP, two on IROx.

Gypohierax angolensis Palm-nut Vulture. Two on IBol, a pair building a nest along CP, regularly 1-2 on each of IBub, IRub, IROx and IP.

Necrosyrtes monachus Hooded Vulture. Common at Bissau, NES, on IBol, IBub and IRub.

Gyps africanus White-backed Vulture. Eight in a mixed party of vultures along road NES.

Aegypius occipitalis White-headed Vulture. One in a mixed party of vultures along road NES.

Polyboroides typus Harrier Hawk. Two on IBub.

**Circus pygargus* Montagu's Harrier. A male NES. (5, 6, 7)

**C. aeruginosus* Marsh Harrier. A female NES. (5, 6, 7, 8)

Lophaelix occipitalis Long-crested Hawk-eagle. One NES.

Falconidae

**Falco tinnunculus* Common Kestrel. One on IBub. (5, 7)

Gruidae

Balearica pavonina Black Crowned Crane. A party of 12 NES.

Recurvirostridae

Himantopus himantopus Black-winged Stilt. Twelve near Bissau harbour, five NES, three on IBol.

**Recurvirostra avocetta* Avocet. Four NES. (5, 6, 7)

Burhinidae

Burhinus senegalensis Senegal Thick-knee. Two on each of IBol and IBub.

Glareolidae

Glareola pratincola Common Pratincole. A party of c. 25 NES.

Charadriidae

**Charadrius hiaticula* Ringed Plover. Regular in small numbers in littoral at Bissau and on all islands visited. Collected by Monard (1940) but excluded by Frade & Bacelar (1955) who suspected the record to be of *C. dubius*. Monard's measurements, however, agree with those of *hiaticula*. (5, 6, 7, 8)

**Pluvialis squatarola* Grey Plover. Regular in small numbers in littoral on all islands visited. Included by Dowsett (1993) on the basis of unpublished ringing recoveries. (5, 6, 7, 8)

Vanellus spinosus Spur-winged Plover. Small numbers (<5) at Bissau, NES, IBol, IBub and IROx.

Scolopacidae

Calidris alba Sanderling. Small numbers on sandy beaches on IROx and IP.

C. minuta Little Stint. C. 30 near Bissau harbour.

C. ferruginea Curlew Sandpiper. Common in littoral on all islands visited; several hundred roosting on sandbanks between IBub and IRub.

**C. alpina* Dunlin. Small numbers in littoral on IBol and along CP. Apparently a relatively scarce visitor. (6, 7, 8)

Limosa limosa Black-tailed Godwit. C. 25 near Bissau harbour.

L. lapponica Bar-tailed Godwit. Common in littoral near Bissau and on all islands visited.

Numenius phaeopus Whimbrel. Common in littoral near Bissau and on all islands visited.

**N. arquata* Curlew. Two along CP, three on I Rox, four on IP. Widespread but less common than the previous species. (5, 6, 7, 8)

**Tringa erythropus* Spotted Redshank. One in rice fields NES. Rather uncommon. A specimen attributed to this species by Monard (1940) was transferred to *T. totanus* by Frade & Bacelar (1955). The measurements given by Monard do indeed agree with those of *totanus* and not with *erythropus*. (6, 7, 8)

T. totanus Redshank. Regular in small numbers at all localities visited.

T. stagnatilis Marsh Sandpiper. Three NES, two along CP.

T. nebularia Greenshank. Widespread in small numbers at all localities visited.

Actitis hypoleucos Common Sandpiper. Regular in small numbers in littoral on all islands visited.

Arenaria interpres Turnstone. Common in littoral at Bissau and on all islands visited.

Laridae

Larus cirrocephalus Grey-headed Gull. C. 10 at Bissau harbour; one along shore on IRub.

**L. ridibundus* Black-headed Gull. Two at Bissau harbour. (7)

Sternidae

Gelochelidon nilotica Gull-billed Tern. Regular in small numbers along shore of all islands visited.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern. Regular in small numbers along shore of all islands visited.

**S. maxima* Royal Tern. Flocks of up to 30 offshore near CG; c. 20 at Bissau harbour; 12 along CP; five off IP. (5, 6, 7, 8)

**S. sandvicensis* Sandwich Tern. Six along CP; flocks of up to 20 along IBub, IRub and I Rox. Included by Dowsett (1993) on the basis of unpublished ringing recoveries. (4, 5, 7, 8)

**S. albifrons* Little Tern. Small flocks (< 10) along IBol, CP, IBub, IRub and I Rox. (5, 6, 7, 8)

**Chlidonias nigra* Black Tern. Flocks of up to 30 at Bissau harbour, along CP, IBub and IRub. (6, 7)

Columbidae

Treron calva Green Pigeon. Two on IBub, two on I Rox.

Turtur afer Blue-spotted Wood Dove. Common on all islands visited.

Oena capensis Namaqua Dove. Three NES.

Streptopelia vinacea Vinaceous Dove. C. 10 NES; common on IBol.

S. senegalensis Laughing Dove. Several at Bissau.

Psittacidae

Poicephalus senegalus Senegal Parrot. Two along CP. There is no documentary evidence to support Dowsett's (1993) "definite breeding" code.

Psittacula krameri Ring-necked Parakeet. Flocks of up to 10 on IBol, along CP and on IBub.

Musophagidae

Crinifer piscator Western Grey Plantain-eater. Two along CP.

Cuculidae

Chrysococcyx klaas Klaas's Cuckoo. A female on IRox.

Centropus senegalensis Senegal Coucal. Five on IBol.

Apodidae

Cypsiurus parvus Palm Swift. Flocks of up to eight on IBol.

Apus affinis Little Swift. Common at Bissau.

Alcedinidae

Ceryle rudis Pied Kingfisher. Several at Bissau harbour, on IBol, along CP and on IRub.

Meropidae

Merops pusillus Little Bee-eater. Two on IBol.

M. albicollis White-throated Bee-eater. C. 10 NES; two along CP.

M. persicus Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. Flocks of up to 20 on all islands visited.

Coraciidae

Coracias cyanogaster Blue-bellied Roller. One on IBol.

C. abyssinica Abyssinian Roller. One at Bissau, three NES, five on IBub.

Eurystomus glaucurus Broad-billed Roller. Twelve along CP.

Phoeniculidae

Phoeniculus purpureus Green Wood-Hoopoe. A party of six on IBol.

Bucerotidae

Ceratogymna fistulator Piping Hornbill. Three on IBub, two on IRub.

Picidae

Mesopicus goertae Grey Woodpecker. Two NES.

Hirundinidae

**Riparia paludicola* African Sand Martin. Small numbers (< 10) on IBub and IRox. Apparently not recorded before.

Hirundo lucida Red-chested Swallow. Small numbers at all localities visited.

H. senegalensis Mosque Swallow. C. 30 on IBub.

Motacillidae

Motacilla flava Yellow Wagtail. C. 20 on IBub.

**M. alba* White Wagtail. Two at Bissau harbour. (7, 8)

Laniidae

Dryoscopus gambensis Gambian Puff-back Shrike. A male and a female along CP.

Laniarius barbarus Barbary Shrike. Five NES.

**Lanius senator* Woodchat Shrike. A male on IBol and another on IRox. (7)

Dicruridae

Dicrurus adsimilis Glossy-backed Drongo. One NES.

Sturnidae

Lamprolornis splendidus Splendid Glossy Starling. C. 25 NES.

Cinnyricinclus leucogaster Amethyst Starling. A male and a female on IBub.

Corvidae

Corvus albus Pied Crow. Several at Bissau and NES, four on IROx, two on IP.

Pycnonotidae

Pycnonotus barbatus Common Bulbul. Common at Bissau, NES, on IBol and along CP. There is no documentary evidence to support Dowsett's (1993) "definite breeding" code.

Timaliidae

Turdoides plebejus Brown Babbler. A party of six on IBol.

Sylviidae

**Phylloscopus collybita* Chiffchaff. One singing in a garden, Bissau. (7)

Prinia subflava/fluviatilis Tawny-flanked/River Prinia. One on IP (cf. Naurois & Morel 1995).

Muscicapidae

Terpsiphone viridis Paradise Flycatcher. Two on IROx, 2-4 on IBub.

Nectariniidae

Nectarinia venusta Yellow-bellied Sunbird. Three NES, two on IBol, four along CP, two on IP.

N. chloropygia Olive-bellied Sunbird. Two on IBub, two on IRub, two on IROx.

Ploceidae

Ploceus cucullatus Village Weaver. During a Harmattan dust storm (no land in sight), c. 30 stayed on the ship for at least one hour while we approached CG; common NES and on all islands visited.

**P. superciliosus* Compact Weaver. A male and a female along CP. (2, 8)

Estrildidae

Lagonosticta senegala Senegal Fire-Finch. Common NES.

Lonchura cucullata Bronze Mannikin. Common in villages on IBub.

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Appendix 1

Species not included by Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) but included in later publications, which are in error or for which no further details are available.

Species for which no further details are available

1 — White (1965) "records off Portuguese Guinea", included by Dowsett (1993);
2 — Scott & Pineau (1990), cited in Araújo (1994); 3 — Smith & Limoges (1989);
4 — Tauraco data bank "miscellaneous records" (Dowsett 1993); 5 — Ferreira (1973), cited in Smith & Limoges (1989).

Phaethon aethereus 1

Sterna anaethetus 4

Macheiramphus alcinus 2

Streptopelia turtur 5

Aegyptius tracheliotus 3

Centropus monachus 5

Accipiter tachiro 4

Coracias garrulus 5

A. melanoleucus 2

Andropadus gracilirostris 2

Aquila rapax 2

Euplectes ardens 5

Otis arabs 5

Species included by Dowsett (1993) in error

Platalea leucorodia. Based on Naurois (1969), where the species is named in error for *P. alba*.

Columba livia. Based on White (1965) "Loss Islands (Portuguese Guinea)", but these islands are off Guinea-Conakry.

Appendix 2

Species not included in Frade & Bacelar (1955, 1959) nor observed by me in Jan 1986, but reported by other authors

Numbered references are as follows: 1 — Fairbairn (1932); 2 — Fry (1965); 3 — Spencer (1965); 4 — Naurois (1966); 5 — Naurois (1969); 6 — Voous (1970); 7 — Madureira (1978); 8 — Poorter & Zwarts (1984); 9 — Altenburg & van der Kamp (1986); 10 — Dowsett *et al.* (1988); 11 — Altenburg *et al.* (1992); 12 — Araújo (1994). References are placed between square brackets when identification was reported to be not fully satisfactory.

Oceanites oceanicus 1

Dendrocygna bicolor 8, 9

Sula bassana 3

Tadorna tadorna 8

Pelecanus onocrotalus 8, 9, 12

Anas crecca 8

Phalacrocorax carbo 4, 5, 11, 12

A. acuta 8, 9

Plegadis falcinellus 8, 9, 11

A. clypeata 11

Phoenicopiterus ruber [4, 5], 8, 9, 11, 12

Aythya ferina 8, 11

- Falco chicquera* 11
F. cuvieri 11, 12
F. peregrinus 11
Coturnix coturnix 12
C. chinensis 12
Turnix sylvatica 11
Porphyrio porphyrio 8, 12
Haematopus ostralegus 8, 9, 11
Charadrius pecuarius 11
C. alexandrinus 8, 9, 11, 12
C. marginatus 11, 12
Calidris canutus 8, 11
Lymnocyptes minimus 11
Gallinago gallinago 8, 9, 11, 12
Tringa ochropus 8, 9, 11, 12
Stercorarius parasiticus 6
Larus minutus 12
L. sabini 2, 6
L. genei 8, 11, 12
L. fuscus 9, 11
Sterna bengalensis 11
S. dougallii [11]
S. hirundo 4, 5, [9], 11, 12
S. paradisaea 6 [9, 11]
Chlidonias leucopterus 8, 9, 11, 12
Rhynchops flavirostris 11
Pterocles exustus 11
Macrodipteryx vexillaria 12
Apus pallidus 11
A. apus 11
Merops gularis 11
Eurystomus gularis 7
Tockus erythrorhynchus 11
T. albocristatus 12
Riparia riparia 8, 11, 12
Delichon urbica 11, 12
Anthus campestris 8
A. trivialis 11
Oriolus brachyrhynchus 12
O. nigripennis 11
Onychognathus morio 12
Oenanthe oenanthe 11
Acrocephalus schoenobaenus 11, 12
A. scirpaceus 8, 11, 12
A. arundinaceus 12
Hippolais polyglotta 11, 12
Sylvia borin 10
S. atricapilla 10, 11
S. cantillans 11
S. conspicillata 12
Cisticola galactotes 5
C. brachyptera 11
Sylvietta brachyura 11
Muscicapa striata 12
M. aquatica 12
Artomyias ussheri 12
Nectarinia adelberti 11
Quelea quelea 12
Vidua orientalis 11