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Unusual records of Palaearctic warblers Sylviidae in Ivory Coast

On 16–17 January 1995 I made observations of substantial numbers of migrant Palaearctic warblers along the Comoé river adjacent to the village of Kofolo (Comoé) at the extreme northern edge of Comoé National Park. This area is a short distance from the border with Burkino Faso and lies within the sudan savanna vegetation zone. The observations were made in riverine vegetation and in bushes and scrub in an area of dry river bed. The commonest species were Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, with smaller numbers of Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. I spent some time examining these birds on both days and noted among them the following more unusual species.

Acrocephalus arundinaceus Great Reed Warbler. A single bird in long grass alongside the river on 17 January. It had a deformed and elongated upper mandible. Thiollay (1985) describes this species as more often recorded on the coast than inland.

Hippolais icterinus Icterine Warbler. One bird seen well on 17 January but probably at least two were present. The following features were noted: same size as *H. polyglotta*, with similar pale lores and rather faint supercilium. It differed from *polyglotta* in its longer primary projection, the visible tips to the primaries being about equal in length to the tertials, and in the distinctive pale yellow wing panel, created by the broad pale fringes to the tertials. The legs and feet were blue-grey (brown in *polyglotta*). The call was a subdued “check”. Thiollay (1985) lists one previous record for Ivory Coast, of a bird netted at Lamto in December.

H. pallida Olivaceous Warbler. A single on 16 January and two on 17 January. Identified by light grey-brown upperparts and pale, almost white, underparts with a complete lack of any green or yellow tint to the plumage. The bill was long, heavy and orange and the forehead long and sloping, peaking well behind the eye. The length of the exposed primary tips appeared about half that of the tertials. The most readily detected feature was the regular calling, a sharp “chack”, and the persistent tail dipping. Thiollay (1985) lists only one record with other “probables”. Demey & Fishpool (1990) list “several” singles from the south, two records from South Comoé and another from Maracué, all between November and April.

Phylloscopus collybita Chiffchaff. A single on 17 January, seen at close range. It differed from *P. trochilus* in being slightly browner and with less of a yellow flush on the face and breast. It appeared shorter winged in flight and, when still, the projection of the primary tips beyond the tips of the tertials was seen to be noticeably shorter, about half the length of the tertials. The legs and feet were black and the bill mainly black, very slightly paler at the base. The head was more domed and rounded in appearance. The bird called frequently, a shorter monosyllabic “hweel” separable from the disyllabic “hu-eel” call uttered by many *P. trochilus* in the area. Its call, together with its olive-brown upperparts and faint dull-yellowish suffusion on face and flanks, indicated that the bird was probably of the nominate race. There are no

previous records of this species from the Ivory Coast, although it is frequent in central Burkina Faso (Thonnerieux *et al.* 1989) and rarely recorded in Ghana (Grimes 1987). *Sylvia hortensis* Orphean Warbler. A single male seen briefly in rear view, when it flew into a tree in woodland bordering the Comoé River, about 10 km south of Kofolo. Its large size, compared to several *H. polyglotta* in the area, was apparent. The mantle appeared ash-grey, becoming dark slate (almost black) on the back and top of the head. I was unable to note further detail before the bird moved upwards out of sight. Seconds later it appeared briefly in the canopy. I was only able to see the head, which in shape appeared like that of Whitethroat *S. communis*, but larger, with a steep forehead, peaked crown and slim bill. Its hood was slate coloured, with white throat and pale creamy iris. Unfortunately I only had it in view for about 2 s before it disappeared and could not be relocated. I tentatively identified the bird as an Orphean Warbler, a bird with which I am familiar. There are no previous records of this species from Ivory Coast, nor from Ghana (Grimes 1987).

It seems likely that the above species have been under-recorded in the Ivory Coast. Comoé remains a very under-watched area and any programme of mist netting there would probably be very productive.

References

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Discovery of a nest of Puvel's Akalat *Illadopsis puveli*

Puvel's Akalat *Illadopsis puveli* ranges in W Africa from Senegal to NE Zaire (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1973). In Ivory Coast it is one of the most widespread members of the family Timaliidae (Thiollay 1985) and is common in gallery forests in the Comoé National Park in the north-east of the country (pers. obs.). Almost nothing is known about the behaviour of the species, and its nest has never been described (Bannerman 1953, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1973, G.S. Keith pers.