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


# Join the WAOS and support the future availability of free pdfs on this website.

http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.

If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

# Devenez membre de la SOOA et soutenez la disponibilité future des pdfs gratuits sur ce site.

http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.

Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante (2) pour économiser du papier.

February / février 2010

I would like to thank Alan Tye for improving the text of this reply.

**References**

ALEXANDER, B. (1903) On the birds of Fernando Po. *Ibis* (8)3: 330–403.

AMADON, D. (1953) Avian systematics and evolution in the Gulf of Guinea. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat Hist.* 100: 393–452.

MOORE, A. (2000) Comment on species rejected from and added to the avifauna of Bioko Island (Equatorial Guinea). *Malimbus* 22: 31–33.

PÉREZ DEL VAL, J., CASTROVIEJO, J. & PURROY, F.J. (1997) Species rejected from and added to the avifauna of Bioko Island (Equatorial Guinea). *Malimbus* 19: 19–31.

URBAN, E.K., FRY, C.H. & KEITH, S (1986) *The Birds of Africa*, vol. 2. Academic Press, London.

Received 1 April 1998
Revised 19 October 1999

J. Pérez del Val
Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales de Madrid,
José Gutiérrez Abascal 2, 28020 Madrid, Spain

## Colour of the downy young and notes on breeding and food of the Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis* in Niger

Cheke (1995) has described the young of the Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*, adding, however, that there was confusion about the colour of their down. We should like to comment on this question, and at the same time give a more complete description of the young and breeding habits of the species.

Along the road to Say, 26 km south of Niamey, Niger, there is a 6–7 km wide laterite plateau with tigerbush vegetation (13°17′N, 2°11′E). Tigerbush is a type of patterned vegetation where bands of crusted bare soil alternate with dense bands of 2–6 m high bushes. The bands run more or less parallel to the contours, each being 10–30 m wide. At around 8h00 on 16 Jul 1993, six weeks after the start of the rainy season, JB saw an adult Grasshopper Buzzard flying across the road there, with a twig in its beak. The next day, we found a Grasshopper Buzzard nest in the first line of trees, *c.* 15 m from the road. It was easy to reach, 4.5 m up in a *Combretum* tree (probably *C. nigricans*), made of branches and twigs, and lined with fresh leaves. In the nest were two white (not grey: see Cheke 1995) downy young *c*. 20 cm in length. Their ceres, gapes and claws were pale yellow, the distal halves of their beaks dark grey. They had dark brownish grey irides. One of the young was prostrate. Based on the late pin stage of their flight feathers (see below), and on comparison with the speed of development of similarly sized raptors in The Netherlands (Bijlsma 1997), we estimate their age at *c.* 11–12 days.

On 19 July at 8h00 one of the adults was on the nest. At 16h45 there was again an adult on the nest, which left when we approached. Both young were active and, to our surprise, their down was pale reddish brown. We believe this sudden change in colour of both young at the same time came from red dust in the rain that had fallen since our previous inspection. The alternative explanation, a change from white first down to pale reddish brown second down, seems unlikely. Colour changes from first to second down do occur in many raptor species, *e.g.* in the genera *Accipiter* and *Circus*, but in these taxa second down starts to develop after about seven days and takes almost ten days to develop fully (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Brown *et al.* 1982). If our young Grasshopper Buzzards were already 11–12 days old when we first saw them, and if second down develops from approximately day 7 to day 16, one would expect a pronounced change in colour from first to second down to be already visible by day 11–12. Neither would one expect a complete change in down colour to take place over a period of only two days simultaneously in two young of which one is most likely 1–2 days older than the other.

The difference pointed out by Cheke (1995), between the nestling colour mentioned by Millet-Horsin in 1921 (white) and that mentioned by the same author in 1922 (buff-grey), could perhaps also be explained by the same mechanism of colouring by dust, assuming that Millet-Horsin's young, which were in captivity, were kept out of doors. Alternatively, as Cheke supposes, Millet-Horsin may have relied on his memory for his 1922 publication, and got matters mixed up. A change in colour from white first down to buff-grey second down cannot be ruled out, although in that case our own young of 11–12 days seem rather slow: they showed no evidence of an impending change in down colour.

At the time of our second visit, when the young were approximately two weeks old, the pin feathers in their wings were showing rufous flags 6–10 mm in length. Their heads were still covered with down, and not yet bright reddish as described by Millet-Horsin (Cheke 1995). On the edge of the nest there was the skin of a hedgehog, most likely a White-bellied Hedgehog *Atelerix albiventris*. The young were seen again on 20 and 21 July. Soon thereafter they were probably taken by local youths, as the nest was found destroyed and abandoned. Local youths had been seen offering young raptors for sale on another occasion.

If we assume four weeks incubation as mentioned for the slightly larger Grey-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus* (Hoyo *et al.* 1994), young almost two weeks old in mid-July indicate laying begun in the first week of June, around the start of the rainy season. During his 30 years in SW Niger, PS recorded six Grasshopper Buzzard nests; at least two were in isolated trees, one in a *Sterculia*, probably *S. setifolia*. One nest had only one young, three had two eggs or young. He recorded two eggs as early as 19 May, 70 km south-west of our site, near Makalondi (*c*. 12°50′N, 1°40′E), where rains start earlier. At one nest there were 36 days between the young first being noted (18 Jun 1994) and the young leaving the nest (24 Jul). This period is similar to the 34–36 day nestling period mentioned for the Grey-faced Buzzard (Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

According to Thiollay (1978), most Grasshopper Buzzards are to be found in the Guinea savanna Dec–Mar, they breed in the Sudan savanna Apr–Jun, move further north to the Sahelian savanna Jul–Sep, then move all the way back south to the Guinea savanna Oct–Dec. According to Brown *et al.* (1982) and Hoyo *et al.* (1994), breeding is even as early as Mar–Apr. Apparently this picture needs reappraisal, as the species clearly breeds during the rains in Jun–Jul in the central Sahelian part of its range. We think that laying may take place even later in the northern Sahel, where the rains start later still; on 8 Aug 1993, at approximately 14°20´N, 3°05´E, some 200 km north-east of the nest described above and 25 km west of Filingué, we found a Grasshopper Buzzard nest 4 m up in a *Combretum ?micranthum* tree. It was lined with fresh leaves and there was an adult in attendance. Breeding during the rainy season is also indicated by a nest with three recent fledglings in The Gambia on 30 Jul 1996 (Barlow *et al.* 1997).

The hedgehog skin in the nest probably originated from a road kill. Many dead hedgehogs were seen along that stretch of road at that time of year. The eating of carrion by Grasshopper Buzzards is not mentioned by Thiollay in Brown *et al.* (1982), nor by Hoyo *et al.* (1994). However, given the usual type of prey of Grasshopper Buzzards, and their diurnal habits, we do not think that one of the adults would have caught a live adult hedgehog, which is nocturnal, although young hedgehogs might be taken. In Niger and Senegal, WCM has seen young (abandoned?) hedgehogs active during the day on various occasions. They weighed about 45 g. Prey up to *c.* 20 g (*Quelea quelea*) has previously been recorded for the Grasshopper Buzzard (Brown *et al.* 1982).

Thanks to Ans Brouwer for help with the literature search, and to Rob Bijlsma and an anonymous referee for helpful comments.

**References**

BARLOW, C., WACHER, T. & DISLEY, T. (1997) *A Field Guide to Birds of The Gambia and Senegal.* Pica Press, Robertsbridge.

BIJLSMA, R. (1997) *Handboek Veldonderzoek Roofvogels*. KNNV Uitgeverij, Utrecht.

BROWN, L.H., URBAN, K.H. & NEWMAN, K. (1982) *The Birds of Africa,* vol. 1. Academic Press, London.

CHEKE, R.A. (1995) An historical breeding record in Mali and description of the young of the Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*. *Malimbus* 17:106–107.

CRAMP, S. & SIMMONS, K.E.L. (eds) 1980. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, vol. 2. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

HOYO, J. DEL, ELLIOTT, A. & SARGATAL, J. (eds) (1994) *Handbook of the Birds of the World,* vol.2. Lynx, Barcelona.

MILLET-HORSIN, [H.] (1921) Société ornithologique de France. Communication du Dr. Millet-Horsin. *Rev. fr. Orn.* 7: 177–180.

MILLET-HORSIN, [H.] (1922) Déplacement de l'est à l'ouest d'espèces africaines. *Rev. fr. Orn.* 7: 295.

THIOLLAY, J.-M. (1978) Les migrations de rapaces en Afrique Occidentale: adaptations écologiques aux fluctuations saisonnières de production des écosystèmes. *Terre Vie* 32: 89–133.

Received 20 September 1999
Revised 6 November 1999

J. Brouwer[1], W.C. Mullié[2] & P. Souvairan[3]
[1]Brouwer Environmental and Agricultural Consultancy, Wildekamp 32, 6721 JD Bennekom, The Netherlands; email brouwbar@bos.nl
[2]c/o Projet Locustox, BP 3300, Dakar, Senegal; email mullie@metissacana.sn
[3]deceased; formerly resident in Makalondi, Niger

## Adamawa Turtle Dove *Streptopelia hypopyrrha* in The Gambia, with comparison of its calls in The Gambia and Nigeria

The Adamawa Turtle Dove *Streptopelia hypopyrrha* has been known in Senegambia only in the past 10 years (Baillon 1992, Barlow *et al*. 1997, Borrow 1997). *S. hypopyrrha* was seen in The Gambia in1990, from 2 km south of Georgetown Island, upriver to Bansang, on both sides of the river (Barlow *et al*. 1997, Borrow 1997). In SE Senegal, one was observed in a flock of European Turtle Doves *S. turtur* that used gallery forest on the Niokolo River; it was captured, measured, photographed and released (Baillon 1992). Before this, the species was known mainly from Nigeria and Cameroon (Urban *et al*. 1986). These observations suggest a recent extension of range, and bring into question whether the western doves are recognizably distinct from the birds of Nigeria and Cameroon, as was suggested by Baillon (1992).

On 4 March 1999, CRB, John Hook and Paul Longley heard turtle doves calling in remnant indigenous forest at Kunkilling Forest Reserve (13°32´N, 14°41´W), 5 km east of Georgetown, near sea level on the south bank of the Gambia River. The call was like that of *S. hypopyrrha* tape-recorded by CRB at Bukuru, Jos Plateau, in northern Nigeria. When the Nigerian call was played to the Gambian doves, they reacted by approaching the call and perching nearby. The dove observed most clearly had a very dark earth-brown back with pale scallop marks, a contrasting pale face and forehead, and underparts pale pink-cinnamon. In size it was like African Mourning Dove *S. decipiens*. Other doves calling at the site were Red-eyed Dove *S. semitorquata*, Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*, Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus*, and Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*.

Calls of the Gambian dove were compared with calls recorded by RBP at Taboru on the Jos Plateau, Nigeria (Fig. 1). Although recording conditions differed, the calls appear to be identical. Calls of the Nigerian bird consisted of two long phrases and a