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LEVAILLANT'S CUCKOO *CLAMATOR LEVAILLANTI* FED BY BROWN BABBLERS *TURDOIDES PLEBEJUS* - Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillanti* is a common breeding visitor in The Gambia, arriving just before the onset of the rains. Throughout Africa it parasitizes babblers of the genus *Turdoides*; in The Gambia it has been recorded as parasitizing Blackcap Babblers *T. reinwardti* and there are also records of young being fed by Brown Babblers *T. plebejus* (Gore 1981, *Birds of The Gambia*, B.O.U., London). The only other host, anywhere in Africa, is the Chestnut-bellied Starling *Spreo pulcher* (Lamarche 1980, *Malimbus* 2: 149; Gore, *op. cit.*).

An adult Levaillant's Cuckoo was seen in the Medical Research Council Compound at Fajara in The Gambia (13°27'N 16°34'W) on 15 June 1983, 3 days before the first rain of the season, and what was probably the same bird was seen several times until 4 September. During the second week of October an immature Levaillant's Cuckoo was seen in the same compound with a party of four adult Brown Babblers. The babblers fed on the ground, turning over fallen leaves, but the Cuckoo made no attempt to feed itself. It would advance towards one of the babblers with its wings slightly raised and trembling and it cried continuously until fed. Only two of the babblers fed it, and when it sometimes importuned the 'wrong' babbler, it was ignored.

On 20 October a young Levaillant's Cuckoo was seen in the compound making short flights from the top of a *Casuarina* tree; the cry resembled that of an adult bird.

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NOTES ON THE NESTING OF TWO LITTLE KNOWN SPECIES OF BEE-EATERS IN CAMEROUN - While conducting surveys for the International Council for Bird Preservation's expedition to montane forests of the Republic of Cameroun, I had the opportunity to observe nesting activities of Blue-breasted Bee-eaters *Merops variegatus* and Black Bee-eaters *M. gularis*. Little is known of the breeding biology of *M. variegatus*.

Nests have been found in Cameroun, Zaire, Tanzania, Zambia and Ethiopia, but none have been described in detail (C.H. Fry, 1984, The Bee-eaters, Poyser, p. 62). Blue-breasted Bee-eaters were common on Mt. Manengouba crater (5°03'N, 9°50'E, altitude 1900-2300 m), and less common on Mt. Oku (6°12'N, 10°28'E, altitude 2200-2400 m). They were not present above 2400 m on Mt. Oku even though apparently suitable habitat was available up to 3000 m. Seven pairs on Mt. Manengouba, which occupied burnt-over areas, had already begun breeding activities (allofeeding, copulation, nest excavation and egg-laying) by 21 February. One pair excavated a 50 cm tunnel with incomplete chamber two days after a burn. In unburnt areas birds were less advanced with nesting. One male offered a female a grasshopper and a tug-or-war ensued which ended with the male consuming the insect; another pair foraged and sat together for an hour with no allofeeding or courtship attempts. All pairs on Mt. Oku occupied burned areas by March 31, when two nests were found. Thus it seems that in the Cameroun highlands Blue-breasted Bee-eaters wait for their territories to burn before they commence

breeding. It may not be possible for them to choose or dig at suitable nesting sites until the dense, dry, metre-high grass has burned. This must mean that birds may experience a long wait in a condition of near readiness to breed before a territory becomes suitable. In Cameroun, where these bee-eaters occur, people burn the grass annually in the mid to late dry season in order to provide new green forage for livestock.

Tunnels were typically dug into the sides of cuts along cattle paths which traversed all the grasslands of Mt. Manengouba and Mt. Oku. On Mt. Manengouba four nests were examined on 21 and 22 February. Their tunnel lengths averaged 60 (45-75) cm, and two faced east, one north, and one south. Two egg chambers measured 16.5 x 22.0 and 19.5 x 18.0 cm. The first two examined contained three eggs each (one clutch fresh and the other well-incubated) and the second two had no eggs. On Mt. Oku two nests were examined on 31 March, one with four fresh eggs and one with three nestlings. Average egg dimensions of 10 eggs were 21.6 x 16.8 (20.1-24.0 x 14.8-18.1) mm. The nestlings were naked but with feather tufts just beginning to appear on the tertials; two weighed 12.8 and 12.6 g and were equally developed; the third had died several days earlier. This species may undergo 'brood reduction' during adverse weather conditions when food may be scarce, as do other bee-eaters (M. Dyer, 1979, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen University). Unseasonably early rains, followed by three days of dry 'Harmattan' weather in the previous week, may have caused the early death of the third nestling.

An adult caught at the nest weighed 22.2 g, had a brood patch and a small cloaca, suggesting that it was male. It had been brooding the young while its mate provisioned the nest. Of more than 30 pairs observed no supernumerary birds were seen, although that does not rule out the possibility of helpers at the nest as reported for other bee-eaters (M. Dyer & C.H. Fry, 1980, *Acta 17 Int. Orn. Congr.*, 862-868; C.H. Fry, 1972, *Ibis*, 114, 1-14.

Blue-breasted Bee-eaters were solitary and appeared to occupy territories which did not overlap appreciably with neighbours. On Mt. Manengouba the steep slopes of the crater leading to the larger of the two lakes were densely inhabited with breeding pairs. No agonistic behaviour was observed but data are too few to draw any conclusions about territoriality in this species. On Mt. Oku pairs were too sparsely distributed for any interactions to occur.

One Black Bee-eater nest was found on the shallow banks of a small forest river in Korup National Park near Mundemba (5°03'N, 8°50'E) on 4 March. A bird flying from the nest entrance underfoot perched on a dead limb and gave alarm calls. An adult trapped at the nest weighed 29.9 g and had a brood patch, but its sex could not be determined. The nest tunnel was 58 cm long, dug in soft sandy loam. Two fresh eggs measured 25.1 x 18.0 and 24.2 x 19.3 mm. Since the nest contained no frass it is possible that incubation had only begun and that the clutch was not yet complete.

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