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INITIAL DEPARTURE DIRECTIONS OF WADERS AND OTHER WATER BIRDS IN SPRING AT ACCRA.

L. G. Grimes & G. Vanderstichelen.

A few years ago one of us (LG) was able to use a radar to observe the initial departure directions of waders leaving for their northern breeding grounds. The radar was sensitive enough to detect the movements of wader flocks from an area of Saltpans, some 10 km. west of Accra, Ghana. Contrary to expectation the initial departure directions were towards the north-east and by inference, all waders involved make a crossing of the Sahara desert. Night data also suggested that this would be true for other coastal waders located east of Accra, as far as, at least, the Togo border (Grimes 1974).

About half of the departures occur in the hour before dusk so it was possible in the Spring of 1972 to confirm the radar findings by making visual observations at the pans. The purpose of this note is to bring these visual observations to the attention of members who may have the opportunity of making similar observations in other parts of West Africa, and to give further data for Accra obtained in 1974.

Although departures occur in late March, May and early June, they are most numerous in April, and this is the best month for observations at Accra. Generally one can sense the days on which departures are going to occur due to the pre-migratory restlessness that is much in evidence, particularly noticeable in Herons, Whimbrels, Greenshanks and Grey Plovers. All species are more vocal than usual and calling flocks flying above the pans frequently attracted others of the same species. The departing flocks were followed, using binoculars, until they were out of sight, and an estimate made of their departure directions, using local landmarks. Herons, Whimbrels, Grey Plovers and Greenshanks used local winds to gain height before departing, wheras others (Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpipers) climbed directly out of the pans in the

final departure direction. The details obtained for 1972 and 1974 are given below; all directions are towards the north-east. Sunset in April ranges between 1805 and 1809 local time. No mixed flocks were observed.

Species	Date of departure	Local time	Number recorded
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	15 March 74	1825	22
	27 March 74	1815	30
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	11 April 74	1815	3
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*	17 April 74	1750	15
	26 April 74	1820	11
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*	17 April 72	1740	50
	26 April 74	1810	18
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*	11 April 74	1745	15
	14 April 72	1740	15
	17 April 72	1730	15
	26 April 74	1800	8
Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleuca*	26 April 74	1830	20
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*	17 April 72	1740	20
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*	17 April 72	1740	20

Reference:

Grimes, L.G. (1974) Radar tracks of palaearctic waders departing from the coast of Ghana in Spring. Ibis 116: 165-171.