



**West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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COMMENTS ON "MIXED-SPECIES FLOCKS IN FOREST"

Sir,

We were interested to read the account by P. Greig-Smith (Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 13: 53-56) of mixed-species flocking in Nigerian forest birds. During several hundred hours of study of Ghanaian forest birds during the last 15 months we have collected information on almost 100 such flocks and are analysing our data for publication, pending which we would like to make some general comments on Greig-Smith's paper.

Greig-Smith was fortunate to be able to count and follow for 20 minutes a rapidly-moving flock such as he describes. We found that impossible: all flocks were moving too rapidly to allow accurate counts of the individuals in each species; the vegetation was too dense for us to move with the flocks; and the visibility was too restricted to allow us to see more than a small part of the flock at any one time.

Unfortunately, the two flocks observed by Greig-Smith seem to have been in many respects atypical of forest flocks in West Africa. A party of as many as 15 to 18 species is, in our experience, exceptional even in rich forest. Our maximum for one flock was 15 species, recorded on only two occasions. The range of foraging heights recorded within a single flock never reached the order of 30-35 metres; our 'thickest' flock extended for only 9 metres, from 3 to 12 metres. We have never noted any tendency for species to retain 'characteristic positions' in a flock, and although individuals of certain species (e.g. Criniger calurus) tend to move as a unit, we found no general difference in spacing between conspecifics and others. In his list of 18 species we would have expected at least 10 (not 4 or 6) to be calling while feeding.

Three of his species do not appear in our records of mixed-species flocks - Chrysococcyx cupreus (or congeners), Pogoniulus scolopaceus and Muscicapa caerulea (or congeners). From our own experience associations between Gymnobucco calvus, Oriolus nigripennis and Malimbus rubricollis on one hand and the flycatchers and sunbirds on the other are atypical.

From our own observations it seems to us likely that the flock described by Greig-Smith was in reality two independent flocks, one at a high level and one low, whose tracks coincided briefly and accidentally. Some of the species may not actually have been in the flock, but rather foraging independently in the vicinity. It seems to us quite impossible that the activities of C. cupreus and M. rubricollis 'very high' in the canopy could be co-ordinated with those of Apalis rufogularis and Platysteira castanea 'low' in the understory.

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