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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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MARBLED DUCK AND EUROPEAN MOORHEN IN NIGERIA : NEW BIRDS FOR WEST AFRICA -

The winter of 1977-1978 was the best that I have known in some twenty years for Palaearctic duck in northern Nigeria. The reason appears to lie in the pattern of rainfall. Over the years from 1952 to 1971 the five-year running average of annual rainfall never fell below 81 cm. The five-year average from 1973 to 1977 inclusive was 66.62 cm, while in 1977 73.33 cm of rain fell; however, a large part of the 1977 rainfall was in two weeks in August, producing larger floods than usual. The new Tiga Dam, south of Kano, spilled for the first time that month, and the water authority has been releasing water daily since then. It has produced a rising water table in the Hadejia Valley, at a time when the area is usually drying out. Farmers who earlier in the year were complaining about the lack of water, found that they could neither harvest their cotton nor sow for the coming dry season.

In the Nguru area (12°53'N, 10°28'E) there was much more flooding than usual, and the greatest counts of Pintail Anas acuta and Garganey A. querquedula were 1500 birds each. Our well-informed hunter-guide in Nguru, Mallam Yakuba, produced the corpse of a Marbled Duck A. angustirostris that he had shot near Nguru out of a party which, he said, numbered about 50. Mallam Yakuba knows all the Palaearctic duck species that winter in northern Nigeria well, and he said that he had never previously seen that duck. Its wing measured 101 mm. It constitutes the first record for Nigeria and West Africa.

The heavy rain in August 1977 also flooded a marsh on the Karkarna road to the north of Kazaure (12°40'N, 08°25'E) to a greater extent than local people could recall before. The peak duck count was on 29 January, when approximately 5000 Pintail, 5000 Garganey and 100 Shoveler A. clypeata were seen. Local fishermen caught a number of birds on their fishing lines, mainly Night Herons Nycticorax nycticorax, Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus and Moorhens Gallinula sp.; they also caught Hottentot Teal A. hottentota and Purple Gallinule Porphyrio porphyrio, which I had not seen in that area for many years. The Moorhens seemed to be on the large side, and two wings were sent to the British Museum (Natural History), London, where they were identified as European Moorhens G. chloropus chloropus, the first recorded in Nigeria or West Africa. In addition a flock of Coot was present on the marsh, numbering nearly 500 in December; one caught by fishermen was definitely the Palaearctic Fulica atra, not the African Red-knobbed Coot F. cristata. Black-headed Gulls Larus ridibundus were present in numbers up to the end of January 1978, the largest count being 45, with a few Grey-headed Gulls L. cirrhocephalus. Very many White-winged Black Terns Chlidonias leucoptera were present throughout the dry season - too numerous to count but certainly running into several thousands. One Garganey was brought to me bearing a Latvian ring, and I ringed a further 60 of them. A deep lake nearby had a small flock of eight Tufted Duck Aythya fuligula and 28 Pochard A. ferina.

The flooded Kano river between Hadejia and Nguru produced the largest concentrations of duck seen in the winter. On 26 February an estimated 17750 birds were counted. This included 11000 Garganey, 2000 Pintail, 200 Ferruginous Duck Aythya nyroca, and many local duck. This area has been proposed as a wildfowl Reserve with controlled shooting during the season.

R. E. Sharland

BEHAVIOUR OF GREY-HEADED BUSH-SHRIKES AT THEIR NEST - On 4 June 1978 a nest of the Grey-headed Bush-Shrike Malaconotus blanchoti was found in a well-established garden in Bayero University campus, Kano, Nigeria. It was a rather untidy platform-like structure of black twigs, built at a height of about 5 metres in the fork of a Cassia tree. Intermittent observations totalling over 5 hours were made until the last of a brood of three young fledged on 6 July.

Normally the adults would arrive independently at the nest site, but often one would not approach the nest to feed until a second arrived. Before flying to the nest with food an adult would often adopt a horizontal posture and holding its wings slightly away from the body would quiver them rapidly. That was observed in two other contexts. When two adults were present in the vicinity of the nest one quivered its wings before approaching the other. The third context in which wing quivering was observed may relate to the derivation of this behaviour. Up until the time of fledging an adult would brood the young not only at night but also in the early afternoons, presumably to shade the chicks from the overhead sun. When a second adult arrived with food, this was always given first to the brooding adult which then passed it to one of the chicks. The brooding adult was once seen to quiver its wings rapidly before accepting the food and this behaviour closely resembled that of older nestlings when begging for food.

An adult would seldom approach the nest directly but would spend periods of up to several minutes banging its prey against a branch and manipulating it in the beak before finally wing quivering and flying to the nest. That was particularly the case with large items like mantids and with a lizard which was broken into pieces before being fed to the young.

Twice I saw three adult shrikes in the vicinity of the nest. When the nest was first discovered one adult, presumably incubating eggs, left it and uttering loud "ptut!, ptut!" calls flew into an adjacent tree where it was conspicuously joined by two others. Then on the afternoon of 30 June I saw two adults actively pursuing a Pied Crow Corvus albus whilst a third brooded the chicks. Although these observations suggest that adults other than the parents may be involved in nest defence, on no occasion were more than two shrikes observed feeding the young. This alone cannot serve to exclude the possibility of co-operative feeding of nestlings, but emphasises the desirability of studies on individually marked birds.

Roger Wilkinson