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SUMMARY

The breeding of ten species of cormorants, herons and ibises in a large mixed colony at Malamfatori, Lake Chad, is described.

On 20th December, 1 000 Phalacrocorax africanus and 80 Anhinga rufa were present, in the central part of the colony, and respectively 337 and 35 nests with completed clutches were counted. By 20th January, these nests contained advanced young, and peripheral parts of the area had been colonised giving totals of 1 332 nests of P. africanus and 207 nests of A. rufa. More adults continued to arrive at the site throughout January and February, so that on 14th February a few of both species were incubating, a few others had small pulli, but most broods were more-or-less fledged. At the end of February most juveniles were fully fledged, but a few nests still held downy young. At the end of March only 30 P. africanus and 10 A. rufa were seen, and none at all were noted on 16th April.

The dimensions and locations of nests of these two species are described.

64 Phalacrocorax lucidus arrived at the site in early December and had commenced nesting by mid-December. 11 nests were completed by 20th January, and 22 by 14th February when 11 held pulli. All broods had hatched by 28th January, and fledged about the first or second week of April. No birds were seen in mid-April.

Herons roosted in the grove in December at night, but were absent by day. The breeding period of the larger species is longer than that of the smaller species. Egg-laying commenced at different times, in the order albus, intermedius (clutches complete by the end of January), ardesiaca, garzetta and ralloides. By the end of March about half of the albus nests had fledged, a smaller proportion of ardesiaca was fledged, and a smaller proportion again of intermedius. At that time nests of garzetta and ralloides held small pulli.

Numbers of all species increased owing to new arrivals of adults throughout February. Maximum nest counts were albus, c.200; intermedius, c.60; ardesiaca, 46; garzetta, 17, and ralloides, c.100. At the end of May very few herons remained except for ardesiaca and ralloides.

Notes on the colour of soft parts and on aggression and general behaviour of the heron species are given.

28 pairs of Platalea alba nested in the colony, and egg-laying commenced in late January. The situation of nests is described. The feeding of the young in the nest, and the begging behaviour of juveniles are described.

130 pairs of Threskiornis aethiopicus bred in the colony, the main body arriving in late January. Nest-building commenced immediately on arrival, and the peak egg-laying period was the first week of February.

NESTING OF THE CUT-THROAT WEAVER

J. Stickley

The status of the Cut-throat Weaver Amadina fasciata at Zaria, where these observations were made in early 1966, is uncertain. Skinner (1965, Bull. Nig. Orn. Soc. 2 (6) : 53) reported the

first local occurrence of this conspicuous bird, which is not likely to have been previously overlooked if common or widely-distributed at Zaria. It may be that there has been a rapid increase in numbers after establishment by one or two pairs about 1965, since two flocks of about seven birds each are now known in the vicinity, and there have been other isolated local records in 1966. Apparently little is known of the breeding biology of this species in the wild; it may at times expropriate the nests of other weaver species, and cut-throats at Zaria have been found roosting in nests of Village Weavers Plesiositagra cucullatus.

Although the Cut-throat Weaver had been seen in my garden on the Ahmadu Bello University campus in the second or third weeks of January, it was not suspected of nesting until 26th when the eggs had already hatched and the nestlings were obviously, judging by the volume of noise emitted, in an advanced stage. The site selected for the nest was a ventilation hole situated above a window of the house, and had been used previously for nesting purposes by birds of other species, possibly due to the good cover provided by trees and tall shrubs growing in close proximity to the nesting site. The accumulation of nesting material in the hole, which is only 3¾ " in diameter, made observation through the mosquito mesh at the inner end of the ventilation hole impossible; only a vague outline of the occupant could be discerned.

Food visits to the nest by adults were very infrequent. On 24th January the nest was observed continuously from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and there were only two feeding visits. On several occasions it was observed that the nest would be visitied for the first time in the afternoon about 4 p.m., and then would follow a series of visits until dusk. Morning visits were just as infrequent, the nestlings being fed for the first time at about 9 a.m.; then followed perhaps two or three visits only, then a long gap until late afternoon. Although it cannot be stated with any degree of certainty, it appears that not only were the nestlings not fed between about 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., but the parents were nowhere in the vicinity of the nest during this period. The adults were not once seen or the nestlings heard during the times stated. There can be no doubt of the frequency of the parent birds' feeding visits, due to the amount of noise made by the nestlings on the arrival of an adult.

An interesting point about the visits paid to the nest by the parent birds is that they always came together; on no occasion did either male or female arrive unaccompanied. The visits followed a regular pattern which never varied. Both birds would arrive and sit for a few moments on a branch a few feet from the nesting hole, the male would then enter

the nest leaving the female on the branch, and feed the nestlings taking about a minute. He would then return to the female, which immediately entered the nest with food for the same period as the male. The female joined the waiting male and both flew off together. The female was never seen to enter the nest with food first. Close observation could not detect any food carried in the parent beak's, suggesting that the nestlings were fed on regurgitated food.

On 30th January, between 4.45 p.m. and 5.30 p.m., the male was observed to make six flights to the nest, bringing fresh nesting material. The female accompanied him on each trip but neither brought material nor entered the nest. She remained on the branch mentioned earlier and left the gathering, carrying and arranging of material to the male. It is difficult to understand why nest repair should be undertaken when the nestlings were at such an advanced stage, and in fact fledged three days later on 2nd February. However, a second brood was commenced fairly soon after the first one fledged.

A SECOND CONTRIBUTION TO THE AVIFAUNA OF TOPO ISLAND, NEAR LAGOS

J.A.Button

Since July, 1964, when my report on the Avifauna of Topo Island appeared in Bull. Nig. Orn. Soc. 1 (2) : 5-8, I have made ten visits to the island, most of which were of three or four days' duration. Observations were limited mainly to the vicinity of the Rest-house, the area described and dealt with in the first report and by Wood-Robinson (Bull. Nig. Orn. Soc. 2 (5) : 18). These observations have nearly doubled the number of species recorded there; but Fry's assessment of the relative percentages of forest and savanna species (Bull. Nig. Orn. Soc. 1 (2) : 7-8) is affected only slightly. The present report includes mist-netting results over the same period.

Additions : (a) abundant; (f) frequent; (o) occasional; (d) dry season; (?) queries status not identification.

Egretta garzetta Little Egret (o) Five seen on 15th May 1965 perchingon fish traps in Porto Novo lagoon near the Rest-house.

Ardeola ralloides Squacco Heron (o) One, 13th September 1965 and a pair, 17th May 1966 flying low over the lagoon.