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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN NIGERIA

J. H. Elgood

Recently R.E. Sharland, P. Ward and I produced a paper in Ibis on the present state of our knowledge of the movements of Palaearctic migrants in Nigeria (1). R.E.S., C.H. Fry and I now hope to produce a complementary paper on the movements of purely African species within the country, but at a preliminary discussion on the subject we had to admit that such a paper could hope to be little more than a frank confession of ignorance.

In the following section of this article I have tried to indicate the various species that are thought to show some regular movements within Nigeria, but the list is probably not by any means a complete one. The intention is to bring these species to the notice of members of the Nigerian Ornithologists' Society, whose help in providing data is solicited herewith and in a letter accompanying this issue of the Bulletin.

Before presenting the list a few generalisations may be worth while. First it must be remembered that birds are the most mobile of animals, and in Europe (and North America) most so-called 'resident' species show shifting populations on such a scale that few are really stationary (see discussion in (3)). The same is probably true of many tropical species also, but from the ecological point-of-view it is probably true that both forest and montane species are essentially non-migratory. Savanna species, especially insectivorous ones, on the other hand, tend to move north in the rains and south in the dry season, in other words in harmony with the Palaearctic migrants (2). Aquatic species are somewhat more of a puzzle, but habitat changes brought about by the wet and dry seasons are certainly at work. Possibly here the flooding of some areas in the rains may make them inhospitable at that season, so that movement may take place in the opposite sense to that for savanna and Palaearctic species.

PODICIPIDAE

Poliiocephalus ruficollis Seems to be seasonal at some places and to colonise new waters very rapidly. Data needed.

PELECANIDAE

Both Pelecanus onocratalus and P. rufescens migrate... Data needed.

ARDEIDAE

A highly migratory family and data are required on all species that are not regarded as Palaearctic migrants. Even the Cattle Egret's Ardeola ibis movements are very imperfectly known, and this species should receive detailed attention. The species in question are :-

- Ardea melanocephala. Certainly sporadic in South (eg. Ibadan).
Typhon goliath. No data to hand.
Melanophoyx ardesiaca. Not known to migrate.
Mesophoyx intermedius. Almost certainly migratory. Care needed in identification.
Demigretta gularis. Probably remains on the coast, but may migrate along it.
Bubulcus ibis. Clearly migrant. Data urgently needed of arrivals and departures in the South.
Butorides striatus. Movements probably only very local. Data needed.
Nycticorax leuconotus, Tigriornis leucolophus & Ardeirellus sturmi are all too rarely encountered to hope for much; dated records welcomed.

SCOPIDAE

Scopus umbretta certainly appears sporadically in some areas (eg. Ibadan), suggesting movements.

CICONIIDAE

A highly migratory family.

The general pattern of movements of Sphenorhynchus abdimii are well established, but data on the route followed should be sought. Very sporadic in the South (only met with once in Ibadan: 13 birds in April). Is there an East-West movement in Nigeria? Another species to concentrate upon.

There is some evidence that Dissoura episcopus, Anastomus lamelligerus and Ibis ibis show seasonal movement, and data are needed.

Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis is too rarely encountered to hope for much but dates should be noted. Leptoptilus crumeniferus seems to show local seasonal movements and data will be welcomed.

FLEGADIDAE

Dated records of both Threskiornis aethiopicus and Hagedashia hagedash welcome as both species may well show seasonal movements.

PLATALEIDAE

The African species Platalea alba is probably migratory. Care with identification needed.

PHOENICOPTERIDAE

Although Phoeniconaias minor is on the Nigerian list it is so rarely encountered that any data would be welcome.

ANATIDAE

A highly migratory family. The African species are all subject to some sort of seasonal movements and data, especially of the more common species, would be most useful.

Thalassornis leuconotus. Stationary and non-migratory on the northern lakes?

Anas capensis. A known migrant. Rather rare, but data useful.

Dendrocygna viduata. Certainly makes some seasonal movements but no clear pattern has emerged. Data should be specially sought.

Dendrocygna fulva. Probably the same applies as for the preceding species.

Nottapua auritus. Appearances in the South are irregular, though seems to occur continuously in the North. Well worth obtaining dated records, especially in the South. The three peese

Sarcidiornis melanotus, Alopochen aegyptius and Plectropterus gambensis are all subject to at least local movements and dated records should be sought.

Pteronetta hartlaubi appears to be stationary on forest streams.

SAGITTARIIDAE

There is little evidence that the Secretary-Bird is migratory.

AEGYPTIIDAE

The Egyptian Vulture Neophron percnopterus has been considered a Palaearctic migrant. No clear evidence of migration on the part of other vultures. Any relevant data most welcome.

FALCONIDAE

The predators include several Palaearctic migrants, some African species (below) which are clearly migrant and on which effort might be concentrated. Many others appear to be nomadic presenting irregular occurrence. The clear migrants are :

Chelictinia riocourii. Many met with once by myself as far South as Ilorin.

Milvus migrans. Although clearly migrant in the South, there is still little positive data. A check on the numbers at a roost would be very profitable. One such roost used to be at Moor Plantation, Ibadan.

Butastur rufipennis. Clearly moves South in the dry season.

Accipiter ovampensis. Known to be a long-range intra-African migrant, but so rare there is little hope of additional data.

Accipiter badius. Another clear migrant. Like Kites, they breed at the southern end of their range in the dry season - a fact of considerable theoretical interest.

Melierax metabates and Micronisus gabar would seem also to be locally migrant and dated records would be welcomed.

PHASIANIDAE

The two small African quails Coturnix delagorguei and Excalfactoria adansoni are both clearly migrant. Recent records of the former from Ibadan and Ilaro show this species reaches the South. The latter certainly breeds near Lagos where Sander found a dog useful to flush them from their grassy habitat.

RALLIDAE

This family of skulkers includes some Palaearctic migrants, and it is likely that some of the African members are also migrant. Though observation is so difficult, dated records of Crecoptis egregia, Porphyrylla alleni and Gallinula chloropus are sought.

HELIORNITHIDAE

There are very few records of Podica senegalensis from the North, but it would be worth while obtaining dates of more northerly occurrences as movements northwards in the rains are likely.

BALEARICIDAE

Although cranes are largely migrant birds there is little evidence that Balearica pavonina shows seasonal movement. Data are needed, one way or the other.

OTIDIDAE

Dated records of all bustards are sought. Neotis denhami is certainly migrant and information on this species will be particularly welcomed.

BURHINIDAE

Since one thick-knee species is a Palaearctic migrant it is quite likely that the African species will also be found to migrate. Data on Oediconema senegalensis will be specially welcome but O. capensis may also prove to show seasonal movement.

JACANIDAE

There is no evidence that the Lily-Trotter Actophilornis africanus

are migratory, but the rapidity with which they colonise new man-made lakes suggests that they move about more than is at first apparent.

ROSTRATULIDAE

The Painted Snipe Rostratula benghalensis is almost certainly migratory, apparently spreading northwards as the rainy season progresses. Some intensive study of this species would be well worth while and records with dates from the whole country should prove of great interest.

CHARADRIIDAE

This family includes many Palaearctic migrants and it is likely that the African species may also move to some extent as well. Data should be particularly valuable for Afroxyechus forbosi, to support or refute the idea that they migrate to rocky country for breeding purposes, and for Xiphidiopterus albiceps which may move mainly as a result of the changing water levels in the sandy rivers along which it breeds. Data will be welcomed for all species of plover.

SCOLOPACIDAE

All Nigerian species are Palaearctic migrants; though some individuals remain throughout the year they are thought to be immatures and there is no evidence of their ever having bred. Any evidence of waders breeding in Nigeria would be of special interest (the Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos is the most likely candidate).

GLAREOLIDAE

Probably all the coursers and pratincoles are migratory to some extent and data will be most welcome. Galachrysis nuchalis certainly breeds on midstream rocks towards the end of the dry season in the South (eg. Olokomeji), and it is not clear where the birds spend the rest of the year. It should be fairly simple to establish whether or not Fluvianus aegyptius is resident at a particular locality. Data for all members of this group are sought.

LARIDAE

Gulls and more particularly terns are highly migratory, mostly to the Palaearctic. Dated records are sought for Larus cirrhocephalus, Sterna albifrons and also S. maxima, S. balaenarum and S. fuscata. Sporadic movements certainly also occur in Skimmers Rynchops flavirostris as witnessed by a single record of one at Ibadan Reservoir, one at Pan Yam fish-farm, and odd records from Lake Chad. Do these birds merely disperse away from their breeding sandbanks along the great rivers or do they show some seasonal migration?

PTEROCLIDAE

Both Pterocles exustus and P. quadricinctus are known to show seasonal movements. Dated records of both species are required.

COLUMBIDAE

It would seem that most species of pigeon are relatively stationary, though the massing of feeding flocks (eg. of Streptopelia vinacea) implies considerable local movement. Oena capensis, however, is definitely migratory and dated records are sought, especially from the far North. There is some evidence that S. roseogrisea and Turtur abyssinica are migratory, and dated records are requested.

PSITTACIDAE

The only parrot known to migrate is the rarely encountered Poicephalus robustus, and any records of this would be very welcome. Psittacula krameri and Agapornis pullaria are also sporadic in appearances and may well prove to show seasonal movements.

TYTONIDAE and STRIGIDAE

There is little evidence for seasonal movements in any of the purely African owls, though any evidence to the contrary is sought. Otus senegalensis may be migratory.

MUSOPHAGIDAE

Turacos seem to be stationary birds although it has been suggested that Crinifer piscator is migratory in the North of its range, and this would not be at all surprising in the Sudan Savanna zone where dated records would be valuable.

CUCULIDAE

All the cuckoos are migratory; the coucals and Yellowbill Cuethmochares aereus apparently stationary. This is a family worthy of very special attention. It is clear that several species migrate into the North during the rains, and dated first records are therefore specially sought for those species with really distinctive calls such as Cuculus clamosus, C. solitarius, Clamator leuallanti, Chrysococcyx cupreus and the two species of Lampromorpha (L. caprius and L. klaasi).

This is a family whose movements in the whole continent have attracted much attention, and it is highly desirable that some real contribution to the puzzle presented by many species may be forthcoming from Nigeria.

COLIIDAE

There is no clear evidence of migration by either species of mousebird.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

Almost all nightjars are highly migratory. They are a difficult group to identify except in the hand. Numerous casualties occur on the roads at night. If all these could be picked up, identified and the data so gathered pooled, the extension to our knowledge might be considerable. Probably the picture will be obscured by the diverse races of Scotornis climacurus (each population presenting a different migration picture) but otherwise this common species might be worth concentrating upon.

MICROPIDAE

A highly migratory family, but the more interesting species are far from easy to identify on the wing, and trapping is almost impossible. Nevertheless information on the following five species would be invaluable :

Micropus pallidus
M. aequatorialis
M. horus
M. caffer
Chaetura sabini

CORACIIDAE

The majority of rollers show low migration. Coracias cyanogaster seems to be local and stationary; Eurystomus gularis widespread but confined to the forest. Information is sought on :

Coracias abyssinica, known to migrate within the savanna;
C. naevius, whose numbers in any area vary so much as to suggest migration; and
Eurystomus alberti which is concentrated into the South during the dry season but spreads right to the far North in the rains, when breeding occurs.

UPUPIDAE

The difficulty of separating the African Upupa senegalensis from the Palearctic U. epops precludes much information coming forward about African Hoopoe movements.

PHOENICULIDAE

There is no clear evidence of movements on the part of any species of Wood-hoopoes, but a refutation of this statement would be interesting.

ALCEDINIDAE

Piscivorous kingfishers seem to be relatively stationary, though Ceryle rudis numbers at Ibadan reservoir fluctuated seasonally, so that this species may well prove to show some true migration.

Amongst the insectivorous kingfishers there are some of the best examples of migration within Nigeria and information on them is particularly sought. The clearest case is Halcyon leuccephala which visits the South only at the height of the dry season. H. senegalensis is present in the South throughout the year, but spreads to the far North in the rains and first and last dates will be particularly valuable. H. malimbicus may be found in gallery forest at least as far North as Zaria. Does it move North in the rains? Dated records will be valuable. H. chelicuti and Ispidina picta are two other species that may well move North with the rains.

MEROPIDAE

C.H. Fry has made an intensive study of this family and has appealed in these columns before for any information on bee-eater movements. Here the species to concentrate upon is Aerops albicollis, where dates for the northward passage in April/May and the southward in October will be very welcome. At Zaria there is some indication that the Spring movement occurs in two distinct waves, presumably of birds from different origins to the South. This pattern might be looked for elsewhere, notably on the Plateau. Data is also sought on Merops malimbicus, known to breed along the Niger and to move into the forest zone in the dry season; and M. nubicus which breeds similarly and disperses widely in savannas after breeding. Is there anything more than mere dispersal to the movements of this species? Melittophagus pusillus is apparently a partial migrant.

BUCCROTIDAE

The only hornbill that seems to call for attention is Lophoceros nasutus which presents one of the few cases of "visible migration" known amongst Nigerian birds. Like so many other birds, it moves North with the rains and the actual passage has often been remarked. Dated records of these passages are now sought, and also any data on changes in frequency in particular areas would be welcomed.

TROGONIDAE

Trogons appear to be stationary.

CAPITONIDAE

Barbets appear to be stationary.

INDICATORIDAE

Indicator indicator is the only honeyguide for which migration has been suggested.

PICIDAE

Woodpeckers appear to be stationary.

EURYLAEMIDAE & PITTIDAE

Confined to the forest and stationary.

ALAUDIDAE

Larks comprise a highly migratory family. Two species are well worth attention, Pinarocorys erythropygia and Heliocorys modesta which seem to be migratory. Mirafra cantillans, known only from the extreme North, is also probably migratory. Any evidence for migration of larks will be most welcome.

MOTACILLIDAE

A highly migratory family with several Palaearctic migrant species. Of the African species, Anthus richardi seems to migrate altitudinally from the plateaux to the plains, but the evidence is very scanty. The very common and widespread A. leucophrys and Macronyx croceus have both been said to show local movements. Dated records of these species will be most useful.

TIMALIIDAE

Babblers are essentially a stationary family, but it has been suggested that Turdoides plebeja moves North in the rains. Evidence needed.

PYCNONOTIDAE

There is no evidence for the migration on the part of any species of bulbul.

MUSCICAPIDAE

The only African flycatcher showing evidence of migration is Tchitrea viridis, which is essentially a bird of gallery forest in savanna. It migrates into the main southern forest in the height of the dry season; but may do so only in some years. Any data on the occurrences of this species in the southern areas will be most welcome.

TURDIDAE

Despite the large number of Palaearctic migrants in this family, only two African species call for attention. The first is Oenanthe heuglini which undoubtedly shows local movements in that it quickly appears on recently burnt ground in areas of Northern Guinea Savanna. Data are needed in order to be able to assess the nature of these movements. The other species is Cossypha niveicapilla, which is thought to extend its range northward in the rains. At one time, before I knew the alarm call of this skulking and seasonal singer, I thought it migratory at Ibadan, so caution is needed in assessing the local status of this species!

SYLVIIDAE

Again despite the array of Palaearctic migrants in this family there is almost no evidence of migration on the part of African species. Only Spiloptila clamans from the extreme North has been claimed to be migratory in that area. Pragmaticolous species like Calamocœtor rufescens probably move southwards as the dry season progresses.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Birds so traditionally migratory as the swallows one would expect to show movements in all their various species. In fact the evidence of migration on the part of the African species in Nigeria is rather fragmentary, and much more information on all swallows is urgently needed.

Formerly only three species were claimed as migrants - Hirundo aethiopica (and further evidence for or against the migration of this abundant and widespread bird would be welcome), Riparia cincta and Psalidoprocne obscura. However at Zaria Hirundo leucosoma and Pseudhirundo griseopyga are probably seasonal in occurrence, and the following species definitely so: H. rufula, H. semirufa and H. abyssinica. These last three hirundines require special study at other localities.

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Campephaga phoenicea, rather surprisingly, affords one of the best documented cases of migration within Nigeria. However further dated records from all areas will be most welcome.

DICRURIDAE & PRIONOPIDAE

Drongos and helmet-shrikes appear to be stationary.

LANIIDAE

Despite the number of Palaearctic migrants in this family, there have been no claims that any of the African species migrate within Nigeria. Any clear evidence of movement into or out of a given area of any shrike species would be interesting.

ORIOOLIDAE

There is no doubt that Oriolus auratus moves South in the dry season and North with the rains. First and last dates would be valuable.

PARIDAE

Tits appear to be stationary.

CORVIDAE

No evidence of migration for African species.

STURNIDAE

Cinnyricinclus leucogaster is both a known migrant and a complete puzzle. A conspicuous species, sometimes occurring in large numbers, it has attracted much attention as a migrant species, but so far there has emerged no clear pattern for its movements. A contradiction of this statement would be most welcome! In the meanwhile, more data are required.

Lamprocolius purpureus has also been thought to be migratory, and other species of this genus may well prove to be so.

Buphagus africanus seems to be migratory also, at least locally.

ZOSTEROPIDAE

White-eyes appear not to migrate.

NECTARINIIDAE

Several sunbirds are thought to migrate, but as some species pass into eclipse plumage when their presence is easily overlooked, caution must be used in drawing conclusions. The best established case of migration is that of Cinnyris venustus, and dated first and last records of this species are valuable. Other sunbirds said to migrate are Nectarinia pulchella, Hedydipna platura, Anthreptes longuemarei and Cinnyris cupreus, while there is some evidence that C. coccinigaster extends further North during the rains. Careful recording at a locality of all sunbird species throughout the year will give valuable results.

CERTHIIDAE

No evidence that Nigeria's only creeper is migratory.

FRINGILLIDAE

The three African species of Emberiza, - cabanisi, flaviventris and forbesi are all elusive species whose sporadic appearances suggest migration. Absolutely any dated records of these species may prove interesting. There is also some evidence that the range of Fringillaria tahapisi may change seasonally and data will be welcome. Finally it is thought that Auripasser luteus is a dry season migrant to the far North. Confirmation or refutation will be welcomed.

PLOCEIDAE

A number of species of this vast family seem to migrate, though to what extent is unknown.

It has been suggested that Bubalornis albirostris shows seasonal movements, and also Sporopipes frontalis. Evidence is required.

The only typical weaver suggested to migrate is Ploceus (Sitagra) capitalis. Is this merely a case of its becoming conspicuous along the rivers when breeding?

P. Ward has shown that Quelea quelea is migratory at Zaria and resident further North (4). There is some evidence that Q. erythrops is likewise migratory further South. All three species of Coliuspasser - macrourus, axillaris and ardens have been stated to be migratory at one time or another. But here again an eclipse plumage may be responsible for their apparent absence at one season. Nevertheless I still think that C. macrourus is present at Ibadan only during the rains, as I claim to be able to recognise the bird in eclipse plumage! Much more evidence is needed on all three of these whydahs.

Coming to the Estrildines, three species are worth watching for as they have been thought to be migratory. They are Euodice cantans, Estrilda melopoda and Nesocharis capistrata. In each case it is

likely to be a seasonal range extension rather than a complete population movement.

Finally both Vidua macroura and Steganura orientalis have been regarded as migrants, though here again the likely explanation is that the donning of an eclipse plumage has made the species inconspicuous. Nevertheless, dated records from all over Nigeria will be of value.

In conclusion, it must again be stated that the species mentioned may not be the only ones worth studying. The birds singled out above are those for which evidence has been produced in the past. Amongst those not specifically mentioned there may well be some hitherto unsuspected cases of migration, and there may well be others that have been overlooked by myself in the preparation of this article.

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A NEST OF THE VIOLET-BACKED SUNBIRD

F. Walsh

On 9th February 1966, whilst I was watching the nest of a Red-winged Anaplectes Anaplectes melanotis at Fellagi Village (9° 50' N., 4° 43' E.) near the Kainji Dam site in the Kontagora Division of Niger Province, my attention was drawn to a bird I had not previously encountered, which frequently and noisily visited a slender sapling. This bird proved to be a female Violet-backed Sunbird Anthreptes longuemareii, in the initial stages of constructing its nest. The nest at that date consisted of a small pad of fibrous plant material resting on the horizontal stem of a thorny creeper about 18 ft. up in the sapling. The nest tree was in a fairly open position with the ground beneath burnt bare. The area however was generally one of thick bush associated with a wet-season watercourse, and such tricket-loving species as the Oriole-Babbler Hypergerus atriceps and the Grey-headed Bush-shrike Malaconotus poliocephalus were seen there during the dry season.