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An unusual number of Palaearctic migrants have been recorded in The Gambia in 1969, particularly on passage. Some of these records may be referable to changes of status (Black-headed Gull and perhaps Blackcap) others to the small numbers involved (Sedge Warbler). Nevertheless, of the Palaearctic recorded in spring 1969, half have been seen later this year than ever before, so late in some cases, that the birds may have summered here. Among the many possible explanations are:-

- (a) Some are not summering but are extremely late in migrating, because of the unusual dryness of the last rainy season.
- (b) Some stay here because they are returning too late to breed.
- (c) Small numbers of some species (immatures?) summer every year south of the Sahara and because of the dryness, these birds have stayed south or west of their usual summer quarters.

The Gambia is a long way from Nigeria, but if anyone has Nigerian records that might throw some light on these questions, particularly the last possibility, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

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MALLAM FATORI, SPRING 1969.

R. E. Sharland.

No expedition from U.K. was able to visit Mallam Fatori in the spring of 1969. This was mainly due to lack of financial support.

Dr. G. Kemp of the Rockefeller Virus Research Unit at Ibadan visited Mallam Fatori from March 28th to April 7th, collecting specimens for virus research. His specimens were identified by Dr. R. W. Ashford of the Department of Zoology, University of Ibadan.

I visited Mallam Fatori from 30th March to 6th April. I carried out a ringing programme by netting mainly in the area of Salvadora bush, behind the observatory. I was assisted by David Coleman and by Dick Ashford when he could spend time away from the virus research work. I found that the gardener, Bukar Gao, had been trained by the Hopsons to remove birds from nets and he was of great assistance in the afternoons.

The departure of the Hopsons from Mallam Fatori is greatly regretted. Fortunately their influence remains and the Fisheries Department and Mr. Mudd made us very welcome and made a great contribution to our work and comfort by

placing a house at our disposal.

The Salvadora persica bush had thinned out considerably since the year before and was lower in height. This may be due to the falling level in the lake or the poor rainfall in 1969. I noticed also that the Acacia belt was considerably drier than the previous year.

No large stand of Typha australis could be found near the camp in which to catch Sedge and Reed Warblers. A small patch half a mile to the south was used on two occasions but Sedge Warblers were found to be equally numerous in patches of long grass mixed with Typha just off the shore-line.

Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the apparently poorer conditions the passage through Mallam Fatori was quite as heavy as in previous years. During the seven days from midday 30th March to 6th April, 811 birds were ringed (in order to economise effort nearly all Ethiopian birds were released without being ringed).

The numbers of Sylvinae in Salvadora are compared with similar figures for last year using the same formula as R.J.Dowsott i.e. number caught per hour per 100 feet of net.

	<u>1969</u>	<u>1968 (same week)</u>	<u>1968 (peak)</u>
<u>Aerocephalus scirpaceus</u>	1.35	0.5	1.2
<u>Aerocephalus schoenobaenus</u>	0.2	0.2	1.6
<u>Sylvia borin</u>	0.35	0.1	0.7
<u>Sylvia communis</u>	3.0	1.7	3.0

The peak day for my seven day period is compared with Dowsott's peak day in each period of five days. The total length of nets in use was approximately the same.

This suggests that the passage of Whitethroats and Garden Warblers was reaching its peak about a week earlier in 1969. The peak for Sedge Warblers also occurred earlier than in 1968; no Sedge Warblers were caught in Salvadora until the last three days of our stay.

Sand Martins were caught by "flicking" on three afternoons but no estimate of the numbers was made. Fewer wagtails were seen and only small evening roosting flights were noticed. An attempt was made by the Virus Research team to follow the wagtails to their roost. They got as far as the River Komadugu Yobe but the birds showed no signs of settling. It may well be that the reedbeds at the mouth of the river are changing. The rains in northern Nigeria were generally 25% below average and they stopped early. Rivers which feed the Komadugu Yobe dried up earlier than usual and the Niger Government built a dam across the river near Yo.

An indication of the size of the passage is that not one of the 913 and 767 Whitethroats ringed in the spring of 1967 and 1968 were recaptured and not one of the 323 and 647 Sedge Warblers ringed in those years turned up again. (In Kano out of 280 Sedge Warblers ringed up to 1967, 10 have been recaptured in subsequent years).

A Little bittern was caught on 4th April and identified as the European race Ixobrychus minutus minutus. The Virus Research team identified a Pied Flycatcher Ficedula hypoleuca.

Observations on Ethiopian birds were necessarily limited. The most striking change was the enormous increase in Golden Sparrow Auripasser luteus which was the commonest bird in the Salvadora. Of Ethiopian migrants

Chrysococcyx caprius was widespread and calling daily, and Scopus umbretta appeared on April 4th.

LIST OF BIRDS RINGED:

Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	2
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	1
Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>	1
Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	1
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	95
"flava" Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	112
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	4
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	8
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	4
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	2
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	69
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	35
Lesser Chad Cane Warbler	<i>Calamocotor leptorhynchus</i>	1
Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolias pallida</i>	19
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	1
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	3
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	1
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	17
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	3
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	422
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	10
Rufous Warbler	<i>Agrobates galactotes</i>	1
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1

The table below shows the fluctuations in numbers of sparrows, plover weavers and queleas at Mallam Fatori in the spring of the last three years. This comparison is subject to the proviso that in 1967 a few queleas were released without being ringed and the areas from which the birds were taken are not exactly the same each year. In 1967 a large number of birds were caught in Typha, in 1968 very few were caught outside Salvadora and in 1969 none. The 1969 figures are those of the birds processed by the Virus Research Team, the ringing team released most of the Ethiopian birds direct from the nets.

		<u>Percentages</u>		
		<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>
Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>	1.8	1.5	3.0
Golden Sparrow	<i>Auripasser luteus</i>	18.2	21.8	43.4
Bush Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris dentata</i>	6.9	1.6	.3
Slender-billed Weaver	<i>Sitagra luteola</i>	12.6	7.9	8.7
Black-headed Weaver	<i>Sitagra capitalis</i>	22.2	25.6	12.4
Masked Weaver	<i>Flosiositagra vitellinus</i>	16.6	8.7	16.7
Village Weaver	<i>Flosiositagra ocellatus</i>	1.7	5.1	4.4
Black-faced Dicoch	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	20.0	27.8	11.1
Total number of birds		735	2,986	318

The spectacular passage of migrants at Mallam Fatori is ample repay-

ment for the difficult journey. Future travellers are warned that the short route- going north 51 miles from Maiduguri- is not easy to find even with a guide. We came back via Kukawa which involved 75 miles of sand and 105 of main road and took $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

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A SPOTTED EAGLE OWL'S NEST.

J. R. Lang.

Comparatively little is recorded about the breeding habits of owls in Nigeria, except fro the excellent reports on the Algerian Marsh Owl by Smith & Killick-Kendrick (1964) and Smith(1964).

Concerning the Spotted Eagle Owl Bubo africanus Bannerman (1953) states that the nesting season is March-May in Nigeria; that no nesting materials are used; that the site chosen is either the broken side of a kopje, or a hollow tree, and that two white eggs are laid.

Fry (1965) states that in the Zaria area this owl nests in accessible situations in erosion cliffs, the nestlings being advanced in mid-April; he also believes they may also nest on buildings.

The following is an incomplete account of the nesting efforts of one pair of Spotted Eagle Owls whose nest was found on a rock ledge near the top of a 50 foot cliff bordering a kurmi half a mile S.E. from Vom Hospital. The ledge (and the whole cliff) faces north, and has a sheer rock face on its west side, an overhanging rock behind it, and is only accessible from its east side, where a tuft of dry grass gave added protection. The ledge is about 7 feet from the top of the cliff.

The nest was first found on 4th March 1967 when there were already two clean white eggs on the bare fine earth of the flat rock ledge. An owl was flushed from a "look-out" post (another rock ledge sheltered by a small bush, about 40 feet to the west of the nest on the same rock face) the other owl was flushed from the nest itself, showing that incubation had begun. From the evidence of droppings, it would seem that this was a replacement nest from one situated lower and to the east on the cliff face, which had been destroyed by bush-fire two or three weeks earlier.

The nest was visited on the 5th and 7th March, when both birds were flushed as on the initial visit. On 9th and 11th March, only the sitting bird was seen.

By 16th March the two eggs were still intact and being incubated: on this occasion the "senital" owl was seen roosting on a kopje on the other (north) side of the valley in full view of the nest, but at least 100 yards away. It was never seen again at the first look-out post.

On 19th March both owls were seen close together in a good light. Although neither bird was rufous (Bannerman 1953), there was a distinct difference between them, one being dowdy (with lighter brown parts and fawnish-cream white parts) and the other much more boldly marked with