



**West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain**



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THE THIRD PAN-AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS TRANSVAAL

SEPTEMBER 1969

C.H.Fry

In 1957 the first of these conferences was held in Livingstone, near the Victoria Falls, sponsored and organised by the South African Ornithological Society as an international and continent-wide event. Its success paved the way for a second conference, at Pietermaritzburg in Natal in 1964; and the congress this year, again held in the southern part of the continent through political and logistic necessity, has firmly established the need as well as the value - and, we may hope, the periodicity - of this event. From now on bird-watchers will consider themselves hard done by if their conference is not held within easy reach of one of Africa's natural wonders, for this year it was held at rondavel encampment with all mod. con., called Pretoriuskop, within the boundary of the Kruger National Park, one of the finest game reserves in existence. It seems the sponsors were somewhat apprehensive lest the 200 or so delegates spent the entire week of the conference, 15-20 September, out in the Park enjoying its wildlife and scenic attractions, but in the event most people found themselves attracted equally by the wealth of stimulating discussion in the lecture-hall, and the 50 papers presented were well attended and in many cases packed to capacity.

It is not really fair criticism to suggest that some of the papers presented fell short of the high academic standard of national and international conferences in various branches of the biological sciences, because several authors diverged markedly in their addresses from their prepared texts and were at pains to put across these aspects of their subjects which they knew would be of greatest interest to their colleagues. To be sure, many of the findings which are presented nowadays by invited academics at august international or national gatherings of ornithologists in Britain and elsewhere are so specialised as sometimes to fire their audiences with little real enthusiasm, even when their academic merit and an advance in learning are clearly apparent. But it is the contrast in this respect which was the hallmark of Kruger Park '69: it would be difficult to compile a set of lectures more provocative in their speculations, exciting in their discoveries of the natural history of species, entertaining in their presentation, and stimulating in the discussions invariably engendered, than those given at the Congress. Instances: European Swifts may spend their entire non-breeding season of nine months (mainly in Africa) in non-stop flight; an identification for "Ibis beninensis" portrayed by sixteenth-century Nigerian artists suggests a cultural flow from Ethiopia; robin-chats' widespread use of vocal imitation acts as an isolating mechanism; there is a general inverse relationship between palatability of bird flesh on the one hand, and conspicuous colouration on the other; which species suffered worst during a recent extreme cold spell in Rhodesia and why; how sealed-in nesting has evolved amongst hornbills: these are just a few of the ideas produced and debated.

Other papers, while all applicable to the African scene, came firmly down on one side or another of some of the great polemics which have for so long been

the preserve of temperate-based ecologists - factors determining breeding seasons, for instance, with three papers on African raptors. Yet others were less disputatious although no less important to the development of general biological theory: the concept of sibling species; the significance of the large number of passerine superspecies in Africa; environmental control of breeding in arid regions (two papers); and so on.

Another most pleasing feature which has marked this meeting was the absence of distinction between professional and amateur. Instead, close co-operation and inter-dependence is much in evidence, and the few professionals in the continent are as grateful for the broadly-based studies of the growing numbers of amateur ornithologists, as those whose businesses restrict their ornithological pursuits are pleased that the museum and university workers and government biologists are enabled to pursue intensive researches on birds.

The close connection of the congresses with southern Africa by no means implies a monopoly of the S.A.O.S. Truc, one would like to have seen a greater representation from other parts of Africa, but delegates came from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rhodesia, and, if I may count myself, from Nigeria, as well as all countries in the Republic. Most of these gave papers about their own territories, and many British, French, German, Australian and American-based ornithologists filled in the gaps. The possibility of holding the next congress in Nairobi, Addis Ababa or Lagos was discussed, but all were agreed that for obvious reasons this unfortunately is not yet practicable.

Nigeria featured prominently throughout the proceedings, I was pleased and gratified to find, with two papers on her birds and with frequent references during discussion to Palaearctic immigration, studies at Lake Chad, the national ringing scheme, and information culled from this journal. Pleasing indeed that the Bulletin not only penetrates to but is carefully studied in distant parts of Africa.

An important outcome of the conference was the establishment of a steering committee for AFRING, with Clive Elliott its inaugural Secretary-General, a pan-African ringing and migration-studies organisation similar in proposed structure and function to the EURING spawned at the XIV International Ornithological Congress at Oxford in 1966.

The Proceedings are being edited by Dr. G.L. Maclean, who hopes that publication - as an Ostrich Supplement available from the S.A.O.S. - will be as early as June 1970.

Lastly, a word about the Park. With sessions chaired by such eminences in our discipline as Professor Berlioz, Friedmann, Niethammer and Voous and Drs. Kai Curry-Lindahl and Etchecopar, it was with some trepidation that one skipped business for the pleasure of the Park. An hours drive at dawn was sufficient to find Giraffe, Zebra, Wildebeeste, Steenbok, Impala and other buck - indeed some of these could be seen just outside the Pretoriuskop perimeter fence every morning; but a whole day was "free" and members of the Congress spent it touring in a fleet of cars. Most people saw over 20 species of large mammals, although birding was somewhat frustrated by the prohibition on getting out of the vehicles. Nonetheless, a formidable list of larger bird species was compiled, topped by a greater variety of large raptors than I have seen anywhere else in Africa. At places, Helmeted Guinea-fowl and Red-billed, Yellow-billed and Ground Hornbills were so tame and numerous (feeding strictly prohibited!) that they became a positive obstruction

to the free flow of traffic, an added variety was provided by verdant rivers, with picnic enclosures - ah, a leg-stretch at last - on their banks.

The management of this reserve, for animals, the landscape, and visitors alike, is admirable.

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CUCKOO CALLS

R.E. Sharland.

On comparing the descriptions of the calls of African cuckoos I find that there are several discrepancies between the various authorities. It is difficult to tell whether these are different interpretations or whether cuckoos do have different calls at different seasons and in different places.

African Cuckoo Cuculus canorus: This birds call is simple and does not seem to vary. Williams (1963) description "Koo-Kuk" fits the bird very well.

Red-chested Cuckoo Cuculus solitarius: Bannerman (1933) has two descriptions of the call. The first (Chapin's) "-three notes uttered in a descending scale quickly repeated - is the only call I have heard in Nigeria." This call can often be heard at night in Jos and apparently also in southern Nigeria as mentioned by Button (1967). Bannerman also quotes Friedmann's description of another call in South Africa which is similar but with a breath in between each note.

Button also identified three other notes - (i) An oscillating "Hwoot-Hwoot, Hweet," from 12 to 20 notes rising in pitch and intensity to a crescendo and declining gradually followed by the sequence "hwitchew, hwitchow, hwitchow". This call must be very similar to the call I have heard from Black Cuckoos in Kano but without the sequence "hwitchew" at the end. (iii) loud single note "Kweer". (iv) a deep mellow trilling.

Black Cuckoo Cuculus clamosus Here there is some disagreement.

Williams	Kenya	Three notes descending.
Roberts (1940)	S.Africa	Two notes.
Bannerman	W.Africa	Two or three notes.
Button	Nigeria	Three or four notes rising.

Black Cuckoos are fairly common around Kano from May to August. In my experience the call consists of three notes but the second is softer and at times is hard to hear. The third note is slightly drawn out and is always a tone higher than the first note.

This July and August (1969) I heard both male and female Black Cuckoos making another call - a harsh bubbling "hwoot - hwoot" rising and descending, lasting for about 5 seconds.

Great Spotted Cuckoo Cuculus glandarius: Descriptions of this bird's call are rather indeterminate. Witherby et al (1941) says that the spring call is a very rasping "Kicou, Kicou" and a very short harsh "cark cark". I have heard both these calls in Kano in May.