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

Join the WAOS and support the future availability of free pdfs on this website.

http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.

If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

Devenez membre de la SOOA et soutenez la disponibilité future des pdfs gratuits sur ce site.

http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.

Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante (2) pour économiser du papier.

February / février 2010

Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	J.P.G.
Redshank	Tringa totanus	J.H.
Niger Morning Dove	Streptopelia decipiens	J.P.G.
Grey Plantain-eater	Crinifer piscator	G.P.
Least Bee-eater	Merops pusillus	G.P.
Grey Hornbill	Tockus nasutus	J.P.G.
Yellow-throated Long-Claw	Macronyx croceus	G.P.
Black-crowned Tchagra	Tchagra senegala	G.P.
Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike	Campephaga phoenicea	G.P.
Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin	J.H.
Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix	J.H.
Yellow-browed Camaroptera	Camaroptera superciliaris	J.P.G.
Buff-throated Sunbird	Nectarinia adelberti	J.P.G.

References

Bannerman, D.A.(1953) Birds of West and Equatorial Africa. London: Oliver & Boyd.

Hoigham, J.P. (1969) Birds observed on Victoria Island. B.N.O.S. 6 (24): 109-119.

Saunder, (1956-57) A List of the Birds of Lagos. Nig. Field 21 & 22.

.....

SOKOTO PROVINCE

(I) Sokoto Town & Environs

BY

P.J. Mundy & A.W. Cook

Sokoto, in the N.W. corner of Nigeria, is at the confluence of 2 rivers; these with the new large artificial lake at Wurno, 2 or 3 other lakes to the north, and a small one 60 miles to the south (Lake Natu) provide a well-watered area in an otherwise generally arid province. Quite probably, this part of Nigeria is an important "gateway" for Palearctic migrants, being one of three such in the north. To date (July) we have seen 46 species of migrants during the northern winter, which almost exactly coincides with the dry season - beginning of October to end of May. This number is one-fifth of the total number of species that we have seen around Sokoto (i.e. within 25 miles of the town), in 18 months.

If we include the recently published lists of the birds of Sokoto especially that of Dobbs (1959), then of a total of 272 species, seen at least once within 25 miles of Sokoto town, no fewer than 71 species are Palearctic migrants. For the province as a whole, exactly one-quarter of the recorded number of 306 birds are migrants (76 species). It would be interesting to get comparative lists of the migrants entering Nigeria through the 3 main "gateways" (i.e. Sokoto, Nguru and L. Chad).

We did at first set out to survey the bird variety around Sokoto, this completely occupying us for 1970. During this year, however, our efforts have been directed towards a number of the more common and resident birds, and report here the first results of these studies.

Grey Pelican Pelecanus rufescens:

This bird, as first noted by Serle (1943), still nests within the town. In 2 seasons, we have seen neither the Wood Ibis Ibis ibis nor the Marabou Leptoptilus crumeniferus nesting here, as both used to do, even very recently.

The pelicans first nested in baobabs (69/70) then changed site and nested in a silk cotton (70/71). They arrive during August and leave during March. By the time they leave, their numbers have grown to about 60 from about half that number of adults. However, when they go out fishing they do so in small groups, and only on one occasion did we see as many as 33 together (October). We have seen pelicans, presumably from Sokoto, at lake Wurno (20 miles away) and they have been seen at lake Natu (60 miles away).

We hope, in the coming season, to do accurate work on their breeding success and to find out what fish species they eat - i.e. whether they fish selectively or randomly.

Hooded Vulture Neophron monachus:

Sokoto is the centre of an area of high population and intensive cultivation. Hence there are large numbers of vultures, and apart from three sight records by Dobbs (op. cit.) in the 1950s of Ruppell's griffon Gyps ruppellii, and one "doubtful" record by Fry (1964) of a White-backed Gyps bengalensis, then the Hooded Vulture is the only one in and around Sokoto.

By means of weekly visits, we closely observed 27 nests, simply noting the presence, absence, and weight of the nestling. In these 27, 10 have fledged, another fell out of the tree during a storm and was probably stoned to death by the local boys, and one is still in the nest and will probably fledge in one or two weeks - i.e. about July 20th.

As one nest was used twice and failed twice, then we can say that 28 attempts produced 11 fledgelings - an apparent success of 40%. A greater proportion of eggs failed than chicks failed, even though adults seem to brood also at night (so possibly the colder harmattan nights are not a causative factor).

The average weight of newly hatched chicks is 80 grams, and weight rises to between 1,200 and 1,700 grams at fledging. After 15 days from hatching, growth rates increasingly diverge - but within that period, knowing the weight of a chick we can estimate its age to ± one day. Although the chicks may return to the nest several days or even weeks after fledging, one bird fledged at an age of 98 days.

We hope next season to take a much larger nest sample, to experiment with 2-egg clutches and to hand-rear a nestling to note its food intake and growth rate.

Pied Crow/Great Spotted Cuckoo Corvus albus/Clamator glandarius

Intrigued by Serle's (op cit) observation of 5 cuckolded crows' nests out of 6 in Sokoto, and Bannerman's (1953) reiteration of that, we surveyed crows' nests. They are very much more difficult to find than vultures' nests, and even using a reward system, we located only 28 nests, of which we were able to reach 23. Cuckoos laid in 5 nests, and we found a total of 2 chicks and 7 eggs.

Unfortunately, this year there has been a tremendous mortality, so far 13 clutches disappearing entirely including 2 cuckoo chicks and 3 eggs. The reasons for this may be many - late rains, preceded by burning sun, our own activities, predation by Black Kites Milvus migrans and genet cats, Genetta Sp., local medicine men etc.

A clutch of 5 eggs is the commonest, but we have only one nest containing 5 chicks, and in the other nests 1 or 2 chicks always quickly died. Hence there is no need for the cuckoos to be aggressive in any way. Among the cuckolded clutches, 4 contained 2 cuckoo eggs or chicks, and the 5th contained 1 egg. The crows lay eggs daily, and do so in the mornings. Incubation starts immediately. The cuckoo in 2 instances that we observed, laid on alternate days (supposing it to be the same cuckoo). In one case we actually saw 2 cuckoos fluttering around a nest, and one of them sat in it fleetingly for 1-2 seconds - did it lay its egg then? The crows paid no attention to the cuckoos.

We have found, therefore, that 22% of our small crow sample was cuckolded. This is nearly double that recorded in S. Africa (Payne and Payne, 1967) - 13% there.

We have recorded the begging calls of both crow and cuckoo chicks, and there is a distinct difference between them.

Ant Chat Myrmecocichla aethiops

The Ant Chat is a fairly common resident around Sokoto, frequenting the laterite quarries especially. In two areas - at Kalambaina, 7 miles from Sokoto, and at Sifawa 20 miles away - there are populations of about twenty each, and extensive series of their tunnels, which may extend to 8 ft. into the earth.

We kept a very close watch on their activities, and nothing seemed to occur until the rains began heavily - from June 25th or so. Local people said that these birds start nesting with the rains, and this is true, as to date (July 13th) we have found nine nests, and only one of these with (3) chicks. In two others which we dug out, there were clutches of 4 and 3 - egg sizes 23 x 18, 23½ x 18, 22½ x 17, 23 x 17, 26 x 18, 23½ x 18, and 25 x 18 the eggs being pure white and slightly glossed.

As we hope to record and photograph the development throughout in individual nests, we dig down to the nest, put an artificial roof on the tunnel and cover it with earth again. At first we used wood for the roof, but termites immediately attacked, and further rain washed in soil so as to completely fill in the tunnel. Now we are using corrugated asbestos.

In a second tunnel close to one with a nest, we found a 5 ft. black cobra (Naja nigricollis possibly) (at Sifawa), and we expect snakes to be the main cause of any mortality.

Various Weavers

We are watching a Village Weaver Ploceus cucullatus colony in a palm swamp that is vigorously preyed upon by a pair of Harrier Hawks Polyboroides radiatus, which may also be nesting. We are hoping to determine the effect of predation, and its amount, on the breeding cycle of this colony to test Elgood's (1963) synchrony hypothesis. We also have a small colony of Heuglin's Masked Weaver P. heuglini, and we hope to make comparative observations of the two solitary nesters, the Slender-Billed Weaver P. luteolus and the Vitelline Masked Weaver P. vitellinus.

In 1970, the Village Weavers nested during August and September and we labelled 54 nests. We were unable to follow through at that time, but within the observation period of two weeks only, 25 nests were lost or became empty - a very high mortality. Most of this was clearly caused by the Harrier Hawks, judging by the torn nests.

REFERENCES

Dobbs, K.A. (1959) Some Birds of Sokoto. Nig. Field 24: 102-119, 185-191.
Elgood, J.H. & Ward, P. (1963) Bull.Brit.Orn.Cl. 83 : 71-73
Fry, C.H. (1965) Bird Notes from N.eastern Sokoto Province. BNOS 1(4): 2-5.
Payne R. B. & Payne, K. (1967) Cuckoo Hosts in Southern Africa. Ostrich 38(2).
Serle, W. (1943) Further Observations on N. Nigerian Birds. Ibis 85

.....