

he goes home to the circumcision village, where he hands them to the mother. The girls do not take part in the ceremony, but their twigs are plucked for them by the young men. They participate, however, in the subsequent dance. The mother places all the bunches of twigs on the roof of her hut outside for that night, and not inside as in the Mathira country. No doubt there are other variations in other parts.

In Mathira when an ancestral 'Mūgumo' tree becomes unsafe from age, or too large, it may be cut down to the accompaniment of a sacrifice. Four cuttings (branches) are planted near at hand and whichever becomes the most flourishing tree is adopted as the tree for the future performance of the ceremonies; the others may either be left standing or may be cut down on the occasion of the sacrifice at the initial 'throwing' ceremony of the chosen tree.

THE NESTING HABITS OF SOME EAST AFRICAN BIRDS

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My excuse, if any is needed, for writing these notes for the N.H. Society's Journal, is that exceedingly little is known of the nesting seasons and habits of the birds of this country. There are also very few publications in the English language that are of any use as guides, and, in consequence, any amateur oologically inclined is very much at sea as to when and where to look for birds' nests. It is therefore hoped that the following rough descriptions of a few eggs and nests found by the writer may in a small measure help to swell the inadequate amount of information published up to date.

THE EAST AFRICAN CROWNED CRANE (*Balearica gibbericeps*)

A pair of cranes of the above species reside on a seven-hundred-acre glade of the Mau forest not far from Njoro

(altitude about 7200 feet). Owing to the fact that there was always present just one pair of these birds I imagined that they would probably nest in this locality. The centre of the glade is traversed by a dense reed- and rush-fringed stream, but, although this seemed to be the most likely spot for a nest, one was found eventually quite half a mile from the stream on ground which had been rendered boggy by the heavy rains of this year (1912).

I was snipe-shooting on this boggy flat on September 16 and had just got to a part where the herbage had become particularly coarse and dense, the grass being largely intermixed with reeds and sedges growing to a height of about two feet, when a crane got up about twenty yards from me, and, as I had for a long time wished to obtain a specimen of this species, I without thinking fired at and killed the bird. A moment after, my companion, who was some distance on my flank, came on a nest which I at once realised belonged to the cranes. It contained three eggs of a dirty chalky white colour and which, when blown, showed blue-green inside when held to the light. I had no means of making accurate measurements and the eggs are now in England, but they closely resembled the eggs of the common English cormorant both in size and texture. The nest was composed of dead sedges and grass and measured thirty inches in diameter, the slight basin formed by the sitting bird being twelve inches in diameter. The nest was raised only some two or three inches above the ground, and was in the centre of a little opening in the dense surrounding vegetation. Two of the eggs proved to be fresh—probably unfertile, the third was very much incubated.

The bird on dissection proved to be the female, and I am glad to say that two days later the surviving cock bird had found another mate.

THE AUGUR BUZZARD (*Buteo augur*)

This beautiful buzzard is one of the common sights of British East Africa. Conspicuous for their large size, dark

backs, white breasts—at one stage of their lives or plumage they appear to have black breasts—and broad, red, fan-shaped tails, one cannot go about the country for long without seeing them.

In the Mau forest their nests are not difficult to locate. Usually near the top of one of our so-called 'cedars,' they are easy to see owing to their great size. Needless to say, they are by no means easy to reach, as the bark of these trees is exceedingly bad holding for climbing-irons, and without irons the lower part of the trunk is usually unsurmountable except for a monkey or Dorobo. The nest I am going to describe was situated near the top of a decaying cedar standing isolated in the midst of a small glade. I had known of this nest for several months but, owing to the great difficulty of knowing at what time of the year to expect to find eggs, I had no guide as to when to visit it. However, on August 20 last I happened to pass that way and, to my great joy, on tapping the foot of the tree an undoubted Augur Buzzard flew from the nest. Next day I climbed the tree with the help of irons. The nest was about thirty feet up in a fork near the top of the tree, and, like many of the 'Raptors,' was so bulky that on getting beneath it I had considerable difficulty in getting round and above it. However, I managed somehow, and found that there were two eggs, very much like the European buzzard's. One egg was well marked at the large end with red smudges and spots, with a very few lead-grey markings interspersed; the other had very few markings and was practically dirty-white in coloration. The nest was neatly lined with green wild olive leaves and small leaf-covered branches of the same tree. The body of the nest—and it was very large, being about thirty inches in diameter and eighteen inches deep, obviously the accumulation of many years—was made of rough sticks and boughs, the majority of them long since dead. The eggs proved to be in the last stages of incubation, in fact one was cracked and on the point of hatching.

The old birds were undemonstrative, but one of them had returned to the nest before I was a hundred yards away from the foot of the tree.

Columba arquatrix.

This appears to be the commonest pigeon of the Mau forests and probably of other forests elsewhere in British East Africa. Conspicuous for its white-flecked plumage, contrasted with the very dark grey general coloration, its bright yellow beak, eyelids, legs, and feet, one can hardly fail to recognise this bird during a stay in this country. In the evenings they fly into the Mau forest in immense numbers. They furnish splendid shooting but, unfortunately, owing to their diet of wild olive berries, their flesh is bitter and unpalatable. Perhaps some reader of this Journal knows of a method of removing this bitter flavour and will furnish us with the recipe.

I found a nest of this species on August 30. The bird flew from the nest with a clatter and thus called my attention to it. It was a typical pigeon's nest—just a few twigs loosely put across each other. On climbing the wild olive tree in which it was situated I found that it was quite out of reach. Although only some fifteen feet from the ground, it was at the end of an exceedingly slender bough, and I did not dare to risk the almost inevitable fall. I could see there was only one egg, so I left it till two days later—September 1. By then I had manufactured a cloth bag tied to a pole. The bird was on the nest and so confiding that I put all doubts as to its identity at rest. On climbing to it I found there was still only one egg, and, after considerable 'fishing' under difficulties, I managed to safely extract it. The egg was similar to that of the typical English wood pigeon's, but somewhat smaller. It proved to be slightly incubated. It would be interesting to know whether one egg is the typical clutch. Two is, of course, the number laid by pigeons the whole world over. This particular bird, however, had two days in which to lay the second egg, and the egg taken had undoubtedly been sat upon for two or three days. Perhaps a second egg was laid and jerked from the nest on the occasion of the bird's rapid exit on my first visit.
