

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi* migration in Uganda

Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi* is the most migratory African eagle and is said to visit East Africa from August to April (Britton 1980). Evidence for large-scale migration rests on observations from Marahari Mt ($6^{\circ} 12'S$, $29^{\circ} 50'E$) on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, in west Tanzania, where large numbers moved southward between mid-July and early September (Ulfstrand & Lamprey 1960), and northwestern Uganda where more than 1000 were seen daily by Thiollay (1975) on 25 and 26 July.

Further information on the scale, season and direction of this migration will be gained by the gradual accumulation of scattered observations of the above and the following kinds. Further observation in southwestern Uganda and Rwanda by Thiollay (*loc. cit.*) helped to provide a link between the observations in northwestern Uganda and Mt Marahari. My own observations in western Uganda between 28 July and 18 August 1983 confirm Thiollay's findings, but at c. 10 days later than his there were fewer birds (376 h^{-1} compared with 504 h^{-1}).

Observations in Uganda

I noted Wahlberg's Eagles fairly often, including breeding birds, active migrants, and others. An adult brought food for a dependant juvenile on the unexpected date of 28 July at Kiganda ($0^{\circ}26'N$, $31^{\circ}41'E$) and others, but never more than two at a time, were seen along the route to Fort Portal ($0^{\circ}50'N$, $30^{\circ}20'E$) and Masindi ($1^{\circ}40'N$, $31^{\circ}43'E$), including one in palms on the shore of Lake Albert at Butiaba ($1^{\circ}50'N$, $31^{\circ}20'E$) on 3 August. There was no indication that any of these was actually migrating.

Soon after 11:00 on 5 August while travelling west through hilly grasslands just south of Pakuba at c. $2^{\circ}16'N$, $31^{\circ}26'E$ occasional Wahlberg's Eagles became increasingly frequent overhead, often associated with Bateleurs *Terathopius ecaudatus*. Then at 11:45 a short distance southwest of Pakuba, several groups of Wahlberg's Eagles were sighted, all moving in the same direction. In the next 15 min a total of 161 was counted, followed by 26, 29 and 160 in the subsequent three 15-min periods: a total of 376 in an hour at the one site. I moved off westwards, in an attempt to determine the width of the flight, but it soon became obvious that either the movement was over, or that the stream of birds had been left behind.

Their manner of flight was typical for migrating raptors. Most of them were very high and could be discerned through binoculars approaching from the north over the broad Nile valley. Their progress was in long glides, with only occasional wing beats, between rising thermals where arriving birds would quickly accumulate to build up in a wheeling cloud amounting to as many as 80; on one occasion there were 131 birds together in one thermal and 29 others in the area. At the height of their ascent the birds were practically invisible to the naked eye, even against white clouds, before they moved on to the next thermal.

Throughout the flight Bateleurs constantly cruised about and there were several vultures and a few Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus vocifer* in the air, but the only other species possibly migrating were two Black Kites *Milvus migrans* accompanying the eagles. As far as could be ascertained from topography and the map, flight direction was north to

south during the long glides above the river, but over land it was less clear because of the birds' tendency to alter course to join thermals.

The height of the observation site was c. 650 m, the weather hot and mostly sunny, with a light northerly breeze under 4/10 cover of cumulus. There was also marked instability with active formation of thermals, although the area over the broad river was cloudless and there was presumably little, if any, thermal formation there.

There was no sign of migration on the next day along the Nile valley between Paraa (2°18N, 31°35E) and Kabalega Falls (2°15N, 31°41E), but further north on 7 August at 10 km north of Nebbi (2°31N, 31°07E) in West Nile Province 17 *A. wahlbergi* flew c. SE in the same manner as the earlier birds. On 8 August at 11:20 two flew c. SSE at 3°13N, 31°07E. During the next 11 days only six *A. wahlbergi*, not obviously migrating, were seen on the journey through Arua, Moyo, Gulu, Chobi, Masindi and Fort Portal back to Kampala. In particular, not one was seen between Fort Portal and Ntoroko at the south end of Lake Albert. However, if they were travelling on a narrow front they could be missed easily if their route were crossed at the 'wrong' time of the day.

Discussion

Wahlberg's Eagle is widespread in Africa between c. 30°S and 18°N, west to the Atlantic in Senegal and east to northern Somalia; it breeds mainly south of the equator in September–January, more rarely to 14°N; non-breeding areas are to the north in the northern tropical savannas of the Sudan, Chad, west to Gambia, from March to August; it migrates south in July–August and, by inference, north in January–February (Brown *et al.* 1982). There is a small breeding population in the north which may not migrate, and it is absent from southern Africa in March–August (Brown *et al.*, *loc. cit.*). Concentrations of birds between late January and early April in Tsavo East National Park (3°30S, 39°00E) in Kenya are probably migrants moving north to presumed non-breeding season areas during May–July (Britton 1980). It is possible that birds follow well-defined routes on rather narrow fronts.

References

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