

## SHORT NOTES ON THE BLACK COUCAL IN NORTHERN RHODESIA

By

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A pair of Black Coucals, *Centropus toulou* Müller, was present on my property near Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia, during the rainy season in 1953. Though they have been seen in the area since, they have not bred again. They appear to be migratory and to enter the more suitable areas, "dambo" type country with scattered small trees and bushes, during the middle of the rains.

The area in which observations were made is by no means "dambo", consisting of a largish area of coarse, rank grass bounded by stands of tall *Brachystegia*, and having scattered about numerous small bushes of *Protea*, *Acacia*, *Bauhinia*, *Terminilia* and the like. Observations cover the period January 11 to February 15 and notes were made on ten separate days.

Calls recorded are as follows:—

- (a) "Cucut, ukut, ukut, ukut".
- (b) A low "Cuut, cuut, cuut".
- (c) A shrill, rapid, laughing call not syllabized.
- (d) A sound like a bubble coming to the surface—"Bloomph".

Calls were first heard around 6 a.m. The following displays were noted.

- (i) With both wings together, spread tail and drooping wings and billing. It is suggested that this might be solicitation—but this cannot be certain as the nest with young was found 18 days later.
- (ii) A flight from about 25-30 feet from a tree across and down into the area. This was a gliding flight with widespread wings and tail, and was accompanied by the laughing call, and ended in the grass—seven minutes later the "ukut" call was given four times and another ten minutes later at 18.30 the laughing call was repeated.
- (iii) With wings fanned and drooped, and tail spread. Feathers on mantle rather raised giving appearance of a ruff. Tail flicked from time to time. This was seen on the day the nest was found.

The nest was found on February 15 and contained two young. It was in coarse, rank grass, the base about nine inches above the ground. The nest was more or less hemispherical in shape about seven inches high, and made of interwoven wide ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) grass with other stems pulled over the top. It was lined with dry leaves. Within the next 48 hours the nest was robbed.

The remaining note I have is dated January 31, 1954, and relates to an area north of my property. A Black Coucal was seen to fly some 300 yards into a tree from which a Senegal Coucal, *Centropus senegalensis* Linn., was calling. Almost immediately both flew into the open, chasing each other, first one then the other leading. Both then flew into a small tree, the Black first, but at once both dropped into the grass apparently fighting, bodies vertical and feet towards each other. After a little while the Senegal Coucal called and both flew up from the grass in different directions, alighting about 50 yards apart. A short time later the Black Coucal flew further off.

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