

NOTES ON SOME BIRDS NEW TO SOUTH SUDAN

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Since Cave & Macdonald's *Birds of the Sudan* was published in 1955 there has been very little ornithological fieldwork in the South Sudan (here defined as that part of the country south of 10°N.). Bowen (1926, 1931) gave the first list of Sudan birds, with short notes on distribution and abundance. Cave & Macdonald (1955) remains the fundamental book for all fieldworkers in the Sudan and describes the birds as well as giving fairly detailed notes on distribution and abundance. They added a number of species to the list by visiting the areas along the southern border. However, there are still areas which have not been visited by ornithologists. It is not surprising, therefore, especially since the use of mist-nets, that a number of hitherto unrecorded species have been found; these are reported below.

The habitat in the South Sudan is generally very uniform. It is mainly Sudan savanna, which stretches from the Sudan to West Africa, but includes the Sudd. It is only around the borders in the east and south that the influence from different habitats is noticed: the Ethiopian highlands on the Boma Hills, Turkana on the Ilemi Triangle, the western Ugandan highlands on the Aloma Range, south of Yei, the Zaïre Forest on Zande - Bengengai and the eastern Ugandan highlands on the Didinga and Imatong Mountains. These areas add a number of birds to the typical South Sudan avifauna. It is also the reason why there are no endemic species known from the South Sudan: either they are birds of the Sudan savanna or they are species just reaching the country from neighbouring habitats in adjacent countries.

In the accounts which follow, birds new to the Sudan as a whole are marked with two asterisks, while those new to the South Sudan (but recorded from elsewhere in the country) are given one asterisk.

BOMA HILLS, 6°10'N, 34°30'E, 1500 m

These are part of the Ethiopian highlands which stretch into the South Sudan on its eastern border. They are mainly covered with broad-leaved tree-savanna except for a small amount of evergreen forest on the western slope which comes down to 1000 m. Large open grass plains with *Balanites* extend southwest of the area.

****ALCEDO SEMITORQUATA** Half-collared Kingfisher

On 23 February 1979 two birds (one immature male, one adult female) were caught along a small fast running stream in gallery forest, below the evergreen forest. I know the species from similar habitat in Ethiopia.

CISTICOLA BODESSA Boran Cisticola

Cave & Macdonald (1955) report this species (as *C. chiniana bodessa*) from the Boma Hills. It was not uncommon on the high plateau, singing from the tops of trees. One male collected on 20 February 1979 had a wing-length of 71 mm. This species is listed here since South Sudan records were not given by Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett (1978).

ILEMI TRIANGLE, from Kapoeta to Lake Turkana, c. 700 m

Kenya/Sudan border, 4°32'N, 34°14'E

Natoporuputh Hills, 4°52'N, 34°00'E

Kapoeta, 4°45'N, 33°35'E

Magoth, 5°08'N, 33°42'E

This area is the northern extension of Turkana District northwest of Lake Turkana itself. The habitat is similar (short grass with *Acacia mellifera* and *Balanites*) to that of Turkana; it is not surprising that most of the birds

found in that part of Kenya also occur in the southeastern corner of the Sudan.

****CAPRIMULGUS DONALDSONI** Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar

One male was caught on 14 June 1978. These distinctive, small nightjars were seen very commonly in the evenings throughout the area, from the Kenya border almost as far as Kapoeta. They were absent in November and December. This bird is not reported by Elliott (1972) from Kidepo (extreme northeast Uganda), although it must surely occur there.

***RHODOPHONEUS CRUENTUS** Rosy-patched Shrike

Cave & Macdonald (1955) record the nominate race from the old Red Sea Province to Kordofan. At the end of November the Rosy-patched Shrike was noticed frequenting the drier parts of the thornbush scrub, especially where there were open stony areas. It was found from Lokichokio (Kenya) to the area here called Kenya/Sudan border. It is likely that these birds belong to the race *hilgerti* which occurs in northwestern Kenya (White 1962b) and which has not been recorded in the Sudan (Cave & Macdonald 1955).

****LANIUS DORSALIS** Taita Fiscal

This shrike was a fairly common resident all over the area, north to Magoth and west to Kapoeta, in both wet and dry seasons. It was found in open grassland with thornbush and in cultivated areas.

****CISTICOLA CINEREOLA** Ashy Cisticola

Two birds were collected on the Kenya/Sudan border on 18 December 1978, one a first year male with wing-length 61mm and the other a female, wing-length 51mm; the female contained a fully developed egg, indicating breeding at the end of the rains. Since there is a second rainy season during April and May, it is possible that the species breeds twice a year as suggested by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960). The birds were found in an open thornbush area with short grass.

***SPILOPTILA RUFIFRONS** Red-faced Warbler

A bird commonly found in thick thornscrub. They were encountered in the Natopoputh Hills in December 1977 and on the Kenya/Sudan border in December 1978. Those obtained were just coming into breeding condition, which suggests that the species breeds in January. The examples belonged to the race *smithii* which is recorded from Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and northeastern Tanzania (White 1962a) but which has not been found previously in the Sudan where only the nominate race has been found (Cave & Macdonald 1955).

****BATIS PERKEO** Pigmy Batis

Three were collected on 22 December 1977 in thick thornbush scrub in the Natopoputh Hills. The species has not been encountered subsequently in the South Sudan. Hall & Moreau (1970, Map 261) show plots in virtually the same area but Elliott (1972) did not record it from Kidepo.

****VIDUA FISCHERI** Straw-tailed Whydah

Cave & Macdonald (1955) did not include this species in their list but they note, in square brackets, two sight records from the eastern side of the Dongotona Mountains (4°20'N, 33°20'E) and the eastern side of the Didinga Mountains (4°35'N, 34°00'E). We have two more records: a small flock with males in breeding dress was seen on the Kenya/Sudan border in May and December 1978 and a single male was collected 10 km SE of Kapoeta. These dates are at the end of the rains and I assume that they breed twice a year. Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) note that they are parasitic on the Purple Grenadier *Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*. The Purple Grenadier was found in the same area and is more common than indicated by Cave & Macdonald, but only

some were coming into breeding condition. The only estrildid breeding then in both localities in December was the Blue-capped Cordon Bleu *U. cyanocephalus* (see below). The single male collected near Kapoeta was calling continuously from a tree near a pair of the cordon bleus, the female of which was ready to lay.

****VIDUA HYPOCHERINA** Steel-blue Whydah

This species was only seen once, in May 1978, 20 km SE of Kapoeta when two males and three females were found sitting near the road in thornbush country. The males were in breeding dress. Elliott (1972) reported this species from Kidepo but did not record *fischeri*, which seems to be much more common in the South Sudan.

****ESTRILDA ERYTHRONOTUS** Black-cheeked Waxbill

It is probably not uncommon, frequenting the thicker thornbush scrub. One male was collected 20 km SE of Kapoeta in June 1978. The species was also seen on the Kenya/Sudan border and is reported by Elliott (1972) for Kidepo.

****URAEGINTHUS CYANOCEPHALUS** Blue-capped Cordon Bleu

These birds were found in the thicker thornbush scrub from the Kenya/Sudan border to within 10 km SE of Kapoeta. In both localities they were very noticeable and common. All five birds collected were in breeding condition and one female had a fully developed plain white egg in the oviduct. It is likely that the Straw-tailed Whydah is parasitic on this species (see above). It is possible that this cordon bleu is locally migratory as it had not been seen before in the area.

These records represent a great extension of range to the northwest. Urban & Brown (1971) give it as an uncertain resident, with no breeding records, in SE Ethiopia while J.S. Ash (pers. comm) collected one in S Ethiopia.

***CORVUS RUFICOLLIS** Brown-necked Raven

The race *edithae* is common around Lake Turkana and east to Borana, Ethiopia (pers. obs.). It is not surprising therefore to find this bird in the South Sudan, in fact Hall & Moreau (1970 Map 436) have a plot for *edithae* which appears to be on the Kenya/Sudan border. I have records of it from the Kenya/Sudan border (May, November and December 1978) and in the Natoporoputh Hills in December 1977. The nominate race is recorded from further north in the Sudan (Cave & Macdonald 1955).

IMATONG MOUNTAINS

Gilo/Itibol 4°00'N, 32°51'E, 1900 m

Mt Kinyetti 3°55'N, 32°55'E, summit 3180 m

Talanga 4°01'N, 32°43'E, 950 m

The Imatong and Acholi Mountains (4°03'N, 32°37'E) are isolated ranges, unlike the Didinga Mountains which are connected with the Uganda highlands. Large parts are covered with undisturbed evergreen montane forest. Mt Kinyetti, which has an afro-alpine flora on its higher slopes, is the highest peak in the Sudan. Evergreen lowland forest occurs on the southern, southwestern and northern slopes (Laboni, Lotti, Talanga). Gilo/Itibol, the main study area, is an old logged valley with *Veronia* shrubs and secondary growth, bordered by forest along the Kinyetti River.

ACCIPITER MELANOLEUCUS Great Sparrowhawk

Cave & Macdonald (1955) had only one record from the Sudan, from Fazugli (now Sennar, 13°20'N, 33°35'E) dating from 1840. This species is uncommon, frequenting the better wooded savanna. One was seen occasionally flying over the forest at Gilo/Itibol. Another example was seen at Li Rangu (4°45'N, 28°22'E) in Western Equatoria, quietly sitting in a tree watching for chickens.

****RALLUS CAERULESCENS** African Water Rail

One was seen on 8 March 1978 very early in the morning in Itibol, walking slowly along branches hanging over the water of the Kinyetti River. The species is known from Ethiopia (Urban & Brown 1971) but has not been recorded before in the Sudan.

ISPIDINA PICTA Pigmy Kingfisher

Between 28 June and 1 July 1978 six Pigmy Kingfishers of the southern race ****natalensis** were caught in Talanga Forest. Hitherto *natalensis* has not been recorded north of the equator (White 1965). All, except one immature male, had the distinct blue spot on the ear-coverts. The light blue barring on the head was more distinctive than in the nominate race, and they were larger with wing-lengths ranging from 55 to 58 mm. Three males were collected. All were moulting or had just finished moulting, while *p. picta* moults in the Sudan in September (pers. obs.). These examples of *natalensis* must have been non-breeding migrants from the south: in Malawi for instance, they are present only between October and March (Benson & Benson 1977).

****PRODOTISCUS INSIGNIS** Western Honeybird

One female was collected with a fully developed plain white egg on 4 January 1978 in Gilo/Itibol. Two further examples were ringed in March and April and another was seen in May. The wing-lengths were between 70 and 71 mm. The species has not been seen or caught after the rains in May. The race involved has not been determined.

Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) note that the Western Honeybird is parasitic on white-eyes and tinkerbirds. These would be suitable hosts in the area since the Montane White-eye *Zosterops poliogastra* and the Golden-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus* both breed in Gilo/Itibol in January (pers. obs.).

****EMINIA LEPIDA** Grey-capped Warbler

This species is not listed by Cave & Macdonald (1955) but White (1962a) states that it occurs on the "Sudan border at Wadelai"; however, Wadelai (2°42'N, 31°22'E) is in fact in Uganda, over 100 km south of the Sudan border.

The Grey-capped Warbler is a very common resident in areas bordering the Kinyetti River, occurring in thick scrub. Sixteen have been caught (four collected, the others ringed) and three of the ringed birds have been re-trapped at the same site some months later. Moulting birds were caught in April and breeding appears to take place between November and February.

****SERINUS CANICOLLIS** Yellow-crowned Canary

It was found commonly in December and April in the higher parts of the montane forest, mainly above 2400 m, feeding on *Podocarpus* trees together with African Citrils *S. citrinelloides*. Near Gilo/Itibol it was seen feeding on herbs and sorghum in March, July and November. Three were collected in November. Wings measured: two males 78 and 82 mm, one female 74 mm; the males were in breeding condition. The birds belonged to the race *flavivertex*.

WESTERN BAHR-EL-GHAZAL

Tambura 3°40'N, 27°27'E, c 600 m

Wau/Busseri 7°32'N, 27°58'E, 430 m

Aweil, 8°45'N, 27°24'E

The southern and western Bahr-el-Ghazal is a little-known area, covered for the most part with broad-leaved tree savanna with frequent iron-stone clearings.

CHARADRIUS FORBESI Forbes' Plover

This species is not listed for the Sudan by either Cave & Macdonald (1955) or White (1965), however, there is a plot in the Bahr-el-Ghazal in Snow (1978, Map 187) which no doubt refers to a record of Cave's (1955, unpublished);

he found three pairs on three separate iron-stone clearings in the vicinity of Busserie on 28 July 1955. The three sites were within a few kilometres of each other and Cave suspected that breeding was taking place, although he was unable to prove it.

On 22 August 1978 a pair of Forbes' Plovers were seen on an open, rocky iron-stone place 30 km N of Tambura. Both birds ran along the road with trailing wings, suggesting that the pair had young nearby. The birds were not seen a month later when I returned to the site.

*****LIMICOLA FALCINELLUS* Broad-billed Sandpiper**

Aweil Rice Scheme is probably the best place for waterfowl and waders in the South Sudan. Large parts of the area consist of grassland which is flooded from July to November, in addition to the rice-fields themselves. On 26 August 1978 I saw a Broad-billed Sandpiper in the rice nursery. It was not at all shy and allowed me to approach to within 5 m. The bird had a double eye-stripe, short dark legs, a fairly long bill curved down at the tip, and a grey spotted breast contrasting with the white belly. Recent records from eastern Africa indicate that it is more common than previously realized (see Ash 1978, for example).

***NESOCHARIS CAPISTRATA* Grey-headed Olive-back**

Six were collected in January 1916 at Maridi (4°55'N, 29°28'E) and this is the only record in Cave & Macdonald (1955). In his unpublished 1955 notes, Cave records seeing a small flock in Wau along the Busserie River between 2 and 4 June 1955, frequenting tree-tops.

I can provide two more recent records: on both occasions the birds were in small flocks behaving like tits *Parus* spp., searching the tree-tops in gallery forest. The first record was on 30 March 1979, 25 km north of Boro (8°35'N, 24°42'E), the second occasion was on 10 April 1979 on the Boro River at 8°27'N, 24°47'E. They are probably not uncommon in gallery forest in the area. Ziegler (1971) recorded the species from undergrowth in degenerate riparian forest between Karuma and Murchison (now Kabelega) Falls, Uganda.

JUBA 4°52'N, 31°30'E, 450 m

An area which has been fairly extensively studied by various ornithologists and explorers in the nineteenth century (see Cave & Macdonald 1955, Appendix II). Grassy meadows, which are temporarily flooded, stretch along the River Nile (Bahr el Jebel) which has some reed beds. More distant from the river the country consists of dry thornbush.

*****CIRCUS RANIVORUS* African Marsh Harrier**

An immature was caught and ringed early in the morning of 20 October 1978 during wader-netting operations. The bird had a wing-length of 347 mm and weighed 285 g. This species is not recorded for the Sudan in the literature.

****CHARADRIUS TRICOLLARIS* Three-banded Plover**

Cave & Macdonald (1955) report this plover as a rare resident at Gallabat (12°58'N, 36°09'E) in the east of the country on the border with Ethiopia. One was caught on 10 November 1978 at the same site which produced the African Marsh Harrier.

****CAPRIMULGUS NUBICUS* Nubian Nightjar**

Cave & Macdonald (1955) recorded it as a not uncommon resident in the old Red Sea, Berber and Dongola Provinces, and possibly also in Kordofan, in desert scrub. Four sandy brown nightjars caught on 9 and 10 January 1979 in short grass near the above-mentioned wader site proved to be Nubian Nightjars. Two were collected and the identification was confirmed by Dr König of

the Naturkundemuseum, Stuttgart, the other two were ringed. Two other species of nightjar were caught at the same time, namely Slender-tailed *C. clarus* and Long-tailed *C. climacurus*.

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