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Guests present were: Mrs B. ADCOCK, D. BRADLEY, Mrs B. CALDER, Dr J. CROXALL, Mrs F. FARNSWORTH, Mrs J. M. GLADWIN, Ms. K. HOFF, Mrs C. M. JAMES, K. KILBURN, R. KIRK, Mrs I. McCULLOCH, N. McCULLOCH, Mrs J. Mills, P. J. MOORE, Dr D. PARKIN, Mrs H. PRICE, R. RANF, M. RIDDELL, Mrs ROBERTS, L. SVENSSON, Mrs H. TYE.

Mr T. R. Roberts speaking after supper on "Birds of Pakistan" described the physical features of the country and, with his excellent collection of slides, reviewed the avifauna. He displayed his very wide and detailed knowledge of Pakistan and of its birds, which was much appreciated by the meeting.

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An extra, informal meeting was arranged in the Senior Common Room, Sherfield Building, Imperial College, on Tuesday 10 April 1990 to take advantage of the visit to Britain by Dr Richard Liversidge. 31 members and guests attended to hear Dr Liversidge speak on "Raptors of the Southern Kalahari". He spoke of his recent visit to south Kalahari giving details of the amount of rainfall in the area and the variation in the raptor population there over recent years. With the aid of some superb slides he was able to demonstrate field characteristics of many birds of the Kalahari at rest and in flight and his address stimulated an interesting discussion afterwards.

## A record of the African Piculet *Sasia africana* from Liberia

by Jon Fjeldså & Hartvig Jensen

Received 24 August 1989

The African Piculet *Sasia* (syn. *Verreauxia*) *africana* is widespread in humid forest in the Congo basin, from southwestern Uganda and northern Angola to the Central African Republic and southwestern Cameroon. However, there are indications that the range extends further to the west (Short 1982, Fry *et al.* 1988). A sight record (ad. ♀ and juv.) was reported from Akutuase in Ghana by Macdonald & Taylor (1977). A more questionable record from Lokojo in Nigeria was given by Bannerman (1933) and later doubted by him (1953): but see also Elgood (1982). The present note reports a specimen record from northeastern Liberia, made by H.J. This represents a 2000 km westwards extension of the range documented by specimens.

This specimen was mistnetted 24 June 1972 by local pet-bird traders, 3–4 km from the small 'bush town' Tchien (Zwedru) in northeastern Liberia (6°N, 8°25'W) in 'Forest area 4', stretching from Tchien to the Cavalla River, which forms the border to the Ivory Coast. The net had been placed in dense second growth dominated by *Raphia* palms, shrubs and bushes, in a partially cleared farmland area, where rice, casawa and yam was grown in small fields, on a rotational basis, permitting development of some second growth shrub, and occurrence of scattered tall trees.



The site was some 2 km away from the nearest primary forest ('timber forest') at that time.

The bird was skinned by H.J. (private collection, catalogue number 724); the bones of the pectoral girdle are kept with the skin. The bird, an adult ♀ with vinous red eyes, orbital skin and feet, weighed 7 gm (recorded on the label when fresh). The flattened wing length is 49.7 mm, culmen 10.5 mm, tarsus 11 mm. The top of the head is Dark Olive-Gray washed with Citrine on the feather-tips; upperparts Citrine towards Orange-Citrine or Old Gold; underside Deep Olive-Gray (all colours according to Ridgway 1911). The face showed the characteristic pattern, with a white postocular line demarcated with a blackish line towards the ear-coverts.

J.F. was able to compare the Liberian specimen in 1987 and 1988 with altogether 58 specimens in the British Museum of Natural History (Tring), the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago). (Five other institutions visited did not have specimens of this species.)

The comparative material showed considerable individual variation, especially in the males. The upperparts varied from uniform Aniline Yellow or Buff Citrine to almost Hair Brown, usually with duller, more Olive-Gray crown; the underparts varied from Neutral Gray or deep grey washed with Citrine to Grayish Olive, chin purer grey, occasionally with pale shafts. The variation may in part result from wear, and did not seem to follow a geographic pattern. Birds from Zaïre may average duller (more brownish) on the crown than most birds from Cameroon, but this did not hold true in all specimens. The Liberian specimen fell within the range of variation of Cameroon birds. The measurements are near the mean values for females given by Fry *et al.* (1988). Curiously, the weight of 7 gm is well below the weights given by Fry *et al.* (9–10.5 for 6 birds from Cameroon, 7.5–9.5 for 12 birds from Uganda). One bird from the western end of the traditional range, Rumpi hills in Cameroon, weighed 7.9 gm (Bowden 1986).

Considering that the species seems to be a stationary inhabitant of dense, tangled forest undergrowth one would expect the western population to represent a distinct subspecies (Macdonald & Taylor 1977). However, according to the present comparison we must conclude that any possible differentiation is too slight to be revealed by the single available specimen from a western population. This indicates that the species is more widespread than assumed in the humid forest zone north of the Gulf of Guinea. Although common locally (Gabon, Bwamba in Uganda—see Fry *et al.* 1988), the species is generally regarded as uncommon, but it is very likely to be overlooked as it darts about in the dense vegetation. Alternatively, small western populations may have become relict populations too recently to have acquired diagnostic features.

The collecting locality near Tchien is near the Grebo National Forest, close to the large Tai National Park in Ivory Coast. These reserves, it is sincerely hoped, will protect the bio-diversity in this region.

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## Evidence for breeding of the Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus erlangeri* in Spain in the 19th Century

by Robert Y. McGowan & Bruno Massa

Received 30 August 1989

Arevalo y Baca (1887) reports the breeding of the Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* in old nests of kites *Milvus* sp. on Coto Doñana and quotes observations by Lord Lilford on its nesting. Irby (1895) writes that Lanners “were found nesting on pine-trees in the Coto del Rey, near Seville”. He found one nest (3 years previously used by a Buzzard *Buteo buteo*) containing eggs at the end of March. Coltart (1952) also describes Lanner Falcon clutches from Coto del Rey, a C/3 from the Dalglish collection and a C/2 in the collection of Lord Lilford. Valverde (1960) concedes that some Lanners were shot from time to time in this region, but nonetheless does not accept these earlier breeding records. Cramp & Simmons (1980) do not mention Spain in the breeding range of this Falcon.

There exists in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) some material which we believe indicates that Lanners did, indeed, breed in Spain during the latter part of last century. One C/3 of *Falco biarmicus erlangeri* is preserved in the collection of Hugh M. S. Blair (NMSZ 1981.061). This clutch was collected on 12 April 1879 at Coto del Rey by Manuel Llanos for Alberto Ruiz. Blair's clutch card reads:

“In a tree. Incubation apparently advanced. Manuel Llanos was a well-known and trustworthy collector, who, at one time or another, furnished Lord Lilford with specimens, amongst them skins and eggs of the Lanner. There are frequent references to him in the Lilford diaries (see *Lord Lilford on Birds* pp. 146, 196–200, 212, 216 and 298). Alberto Ruiz, of Seville, was a dealer of good repute. He too figures in Lord Lilford's diaries. As mentioned by Irby ( . . . ) the few Lanners known to breed in Spain appropriated old nests of other raptors, generally in stone-pines. They were recorded from Coto del Rey and Coto Doñana. These very interesting eggs were sent by Ruiz to J. J. Dalglish, who received them on 14.11.1879. They later passed into the collection of C. R. Wood, and when this was



Fjeldså, Jon and Jensen, H. 1990. "A RECORD OF THE AFRICAN PICULET SASIA-AFRICANA FROM LIBERIA." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 110, 62–64.

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