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## Some new observations of forest birds in The Gambia

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### Summary

Sight records of 19 forest-adapted bird species obtained during 1987-1993 in The Gambia are presented. One species, the Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens*, is new to The Gambia. Most of the others have only a few previously published records. The range of several of these species is significantly extended within the country, and together they provide evidence that, despite the great reduction of forest cover in recent years and the fragmented nature of the remaining forest patches, nearly all forest-adapted species historically recorded within The Gambia were still present there in 1992-3. It is suggested that protection of remaining forest fragments is thus still valuable for bird conservation, in addition to the wealth of other benefits such measures would create.

### Résumé

L'article rapport l'observation de 19 espèces forestières en Gambie pour la période 1987-1993. Une seule espèce, la Fauvette Crombec verte *Sylvietta virens flaviventris*, est nouvelle pour la Gambie. La plupart des autres n'avaient été que rarement signalées. La distribution de plusieurs espèces se voit considérablement étendue. L'ensemble de ces observations est la preuve que, en dépit d'une grave déforestation ces dernières années et malgré le morcellement des derniers îlots boisés, la quasi totalité des espèces forestières jadis observées en Gambie y étaient encore présentes en 1992-93. On peut donc supposer que la protection des derniers lambeaux forestiers garde sa valeur pour la conservation des oiseaux, sans compter tous les avantages que procurerait une telle mesure.

### Introduction

The ornithology of the Senegambian region of West Africa has received a significant recent boost with the simultaneous publication of the second editions of the checklists of The Gambia (Gore 1990) and Senegambia (Morel & Morel 1990). These together have updated information about the status and distribution of birds in an area that is critically placed on the Atlantic coast, at the interface between the arid north and the humid south.

This paper presents new information about the status of some of the most threatened and least well-known species of The Gambia, the forest-adapted birds. The observations reported here include one species new to The Gambia, and several regarded as very rare or otherwise of uncertain status by Gore (1990). Frequently seen forest species, namely Lemon-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus*, Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*, Scarlet-spectacled Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea*, paradise flycatchers *Terpsiphone* spp., Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris* and Black-throated Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis* are not considered further. Of the additional rarer species not reported here, the Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter erythropus* has been reported regularly to the Gambia Ornithological Society (GOS) by visiting birdwatchers. Some of these reports are from locations of untypical habitat, but it seems probably resident in small numbers in and around coastal forest patches. The only two reports that included notes did not convincingly describe this distinctive bird. Rare forest birds included by Gore (1990), but for which no reports of any sort are known for the period considered, are Swamp Palm Bulbul *Thescelocichla leucopleurus*, Chestnut-breasted Negro-Finch *Nigrita bicolor* and White-cheeked Olive Weaver *Nesocharis capistrata*.

### Methods

Observations were made in The Gambia over the period 1987 to 1993, with the bulk of the information being collected in 1990 and 1991. The objective was to compile spatial and temporal information on the presence of bird species in all habitats from all parts of the country. Particular sites were visited for periods typically of one to three hours, recording all species seen or heard during the site visit. The data were treated such that any species was recorded only once on a given visit and a location was only visited once on a particular day.

Each record was identified by date, location (name and 10 x 10 km grid reference) and observer. Detailed notes are added to records of particular interest. All except 116 of the 46,700-odd records (to the end of July 1992) were collected by GOS members resident in The Gambia. Observers, referred to by initials in the accounts below, are as follows: J.R. Alder (JRA), C.R. Barlow (CRB), M. Chable (MC), R.M. Jones (RMJ), F.B. Symons (FBS), R. Webzell (RW), D. & K. Wheeler (DKW) and the author (TJW). Names of other observers are given in full. Identifications were in all cases verified by either several observers, or photographic evidence, or both.

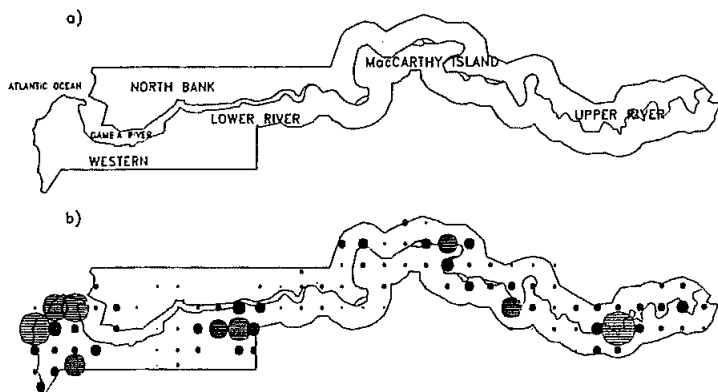


Fig. 1. The Gambia, showing: a) major administrative divisions; b) distribution of Gambia Ornithological Society records for all species, 1987-1992, over the 10 x 10 km grid (symbol sizes proportional to the square root of number of records in each square).

Fig. 1a shows the major geographical regions referred to in the text. Coverage is indicated by the distribution of all records collected by GOS members between May 1987 and July 1992, shown on the 10 x 10 km grid in Fig. 1b. Forest patches in The Gambia are all very small and scattered. Sites of major importance include Abuko (at the northern-most location for White-Spotted Flufftail, Fig. 2), and Pirang, (southern location in the same map). Each of these constitutes only some 70 ha of forest habitat. Gunjur forest patch is a 40 ha site some 25 km to the south of Abuko; Albreda lies on the north bank of the river opposite Pirang. Nianimaru, Gassang Forest and Baboon Islands constitute a distinctive group of swamp forest patches in MacCarthy Island Division (see Fig. 3, map for Black-bellied Seedcracker which has recently been seen only in these three sites).

### Records

#### Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucas*

A single record from Tanji, 28 Apr 1963 (Gore 1990); a possible sighting from the same place, Nov 1981 (Morel & Morel 1990). Six records from Casamance, all in dry

season months between 1980 and 1983 (Morel & Morel 1990). An old record of a bird picked up at sea off Dakar (Brown *et al.* 1982).

GOS has collected three further records: an immature at Brufut, 17 Apr 1991 (A. Shaw & TJW); an adult filmed feeding in a tree at Abuko, early May 1991 (M. & J. Cooke); an adult at Gunjur, 18 Apr 1992 (G. Svahn). Full details of all three records are on file with GOS. All three records were in the late dry season, as were those of Gore (1990) and Brown *et al.* (1992). There may be some dispersal at this time of year.

#### **West African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro***

Considered a scarce forest resident (Gore 1990) and restricted to the Casamance region of Senegal (Morel & Morel 1990). Ericsson (1989) reports a single bird east of Georgetown, and Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) report observations in Lower and Upper River Divisions (see Fig. 1a), but GOS currently has no details of any records east of Pirang.

GOS has more than 20 records of this species between Nov 1987 and Jan 1993, all in the coastal region, including observations at Tanji, Marakissa, Pirang and Sanyang, in all months except Feb, Apr, Oct and Dec (JRA, CRB, MC, RMJ, FBS, RW, TJW); an immature seen at Brufut, 24 Apr 1991 (TJW).

One adult was observed feeding on a large ant-lion in Pirang, and was also observed holding a large stick in its beak while perched, on 15 Jun 1991 and again soaring over the forest on 14 Sep 1991 giving slow "kek....kek" call. These latter observations imply breeding and birds were observed sitting at a nest at Sanyang on three occasions in July 1992 (TJW).

#### **Ahanta Francolin *Francolinus ahanensis***

Reported by Gore (1990) as rare and local in Abuko and Pirang, with 11 records since 1971, including eight from Pirang made by Ellenberg *et al.* (1988) in 23 days' observations. Restricted to coastal Casamance according to Morel & Morel (1990).

Two definite recent sightings from Abuko: in 1989 (JRA), and 23 Jun 1991 (FBS & TJW). An adult with half-grown young in dense forest at Gunjur 28 Jun 1992 (TJW) is the first definite breeding record. Three glimpses of francolins within Pirang forest in Nov 1990 and Aug 1991 (JRA, RMJ & TJW) were thought likely to be this species and they were heard there in Jan 1993 (CRB & TJW).

#### **White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra***

All recent records from Abuko (Gore 1990); heard calling in the forests of southern Casamance in May and June 1980 (Morel & Morel 1990).

On five occasions at Pirang, calling birds were seen in the period Aug-Sep 1991, including one nest-building (JRA, MC, FBS, TJW); also once in July 1992 (TJW & W.F. Snow). Two sightings Abuko: 17 Aug 1991 (TJW) & 15 Sep 1991 (FBS & TJW). Heard at Abuko on several other occasions. Map Fig. 2.

Located by listening for the call (cf. Chappuis 1974-85), moving close and settling to wait, and occasionally imitating the call by whistling. Males gave both a more common "standard" call and a higher pitched, "rapid" version. These would appear to

correspond to calls (a) and (b) of Urban *et al.* (1986). To call, the male adopted a partial crouching posture, with tail cocked, back horizontal and beak pointing downward; the whole body bobbed rhythmically in time with each note of the 6-7 note sequence. In the rapid call the head and neck also jerked backward and forward in time with the notes. After a series of calls facing in one direction the bird turned deliberately and commenced a fresh series from the same location facing in a new direction. This was accompanied by a marked change in apparent sound volume, giving the impression that the bird had suddenly moved away.

A male was observed for 30 min. building a nest in Pirang on 25 Aug 1991 (TJW). It made repeated trips to an area of damp, rotted vegetation, which it gathered in its bill, scurrying away out of site under dense ground cover for periods of 1-3 min before reappearing for a fresh load. During this period the bird was silent although at least three other individuals in the area were calling persistently.

### Green Touraco *Tauraco persa*

A scarce local resident of forest near the coast in The Gambia (Gore 1990); reasonably frequent in Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

GOS has collected 106 further observations, which support Gore's assessment. It has been seen in all months of the year. Additional locations are ten records from Sanyang May-Jun 1991 and Jul 1992 (JRA, MC, FBS, TJW), five at Gunjur, May-Jun and Aug 1991 (JRA, MC, FBS, TJW), and six at Kasa Kunda, Jun-Aug 1991 (FBS, TJW). Map Fig. 2.

Both individuals of a pair, watched for 45 minutes at Kasa Kunda on 29 Jun 1991 (FBS, TJW), made repeat journeys between a probable nest site in the top of a densely leaved tree at the edge of a thick woodland patch, and a large Rosewood *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, from which both were breaking off dead twigs about 10-25 cm in length and carrying them back to the site.

### Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*

Gore (1990) reports one record this century (July 1981) from Brufut; heard regularly in Casamance July-October (Morel & Morel 1990).

A single male photographed while calling from the topmost dead branches of a tall *Detarium senegalense* at Brufut, 18 Oct 1990 (TJW). The site was intensively visited during 1990 and 1991; the call was not noticed prior or subsequent to this observation. A photograph of a female or immature *Chrysococcyx* sp. taken at Abuko during 1990 (F. Grauper pers. comm.) seems likely to be this species.

### Yellowbill *Ceuthmochares aereus*

A single record from Jabang, near the coast, May 1963, plus an unconfirmed record from Pirang in 1985 (Gore 1990). Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) refer to a 1910 record from Albaddar, on the north bank of the river, while Morel & Morel (1990) report 11 observations in Casamance since 1971.

A single adult flushed from a creeper-strewn tree at the edge of a forest patch at

Brufut, 11 Nov 1990 (MC, RMJ, TJW). A possible sighting of an immature in Pirang, 15 Jun 1991 (TJW).

### **Spotted Honeyguide *Indicator maculatus***

A scarce resident in Lower River Division, with a single record from the Baboon Islands area and recent observations at Brikama and Yundun, Jun and Aug 1989 (Gore 1990). In Senegal, confined to Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

Two additional records: a single bird at Kartong Crocodile Pool, 15 Apr 1991 (DKW, TJW); another photographed near Busura, 21 Jul 1991 (TJW). Map Fig. 2.

At Kartong the bird was seen at close range, and a Lesser Honeyguide *I. minor* was seen in the same tree. The Busura bird was in relatively open, orchard-like woodland to the south of the village; a Greater Honeyguide *I. indicator* was seen nearby at the same time.

### **Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivosus***

A rare resident of forest in Lower River Division, at Abuko, Fajara and Pirang (Gore 1990). Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) give two records on the north and south banks near Tendaba but GOS does not have details of these observations. Widely distributed in Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

Between 1987 and 1992 GOS accumulated a further 25 records, including nine at Abuko and four at Pirang. Additional localities are Brufut, Sanyang, Kudang, Gassang Forest, Baboon Islands, Albreda and Gunjur, Apr-Sep, Dec (JRA, CRB, MC, RMJ, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 2.

These observations extend the range of this species in The Gambia; it appears to be resident in the swamp forests of MacCarthy Island Division and also occurs on the north bank of the river near the coast at Albreda.

All observations were in forest except at Kudang (May 1991), when a pair was seen in dense undergrowth (2-3 m high) either side of a freshwater channel winding across an open swamp, 2-3 km from the nearest forest. They flew across open swamp and water, following the watercourse. They may have been in transit between more typical habitat locations.

### **Square-Tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii***

Of uncertain status; there is a record for Nianimaru in 1899 (Budgett 1901), and five recent records, all from December, at Kabafitta, Abuko and Mile 65 (Gore 1990). Records from improbable habitat near the tourist centres are rejected, but in view of the fact that the species is widespread in forest patches of Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990), it is likely to be a rare resident in remnant forest in The Gambia (Gore 1990).

There are 15 reliable sight records from 1991 to 1993 in four localities, with photographic support, including Baboon Islands, Gassang Forest, Nianimaru and Albreda, in all months except Jan-Mar (JRA, MC, RMJ, FBS, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 3.

Conspicuous in Gassang Forest, high in the branches of *Mitragyna stipula* trees. Not found in Abuko and Pirang despite being present across the river near Albreda.

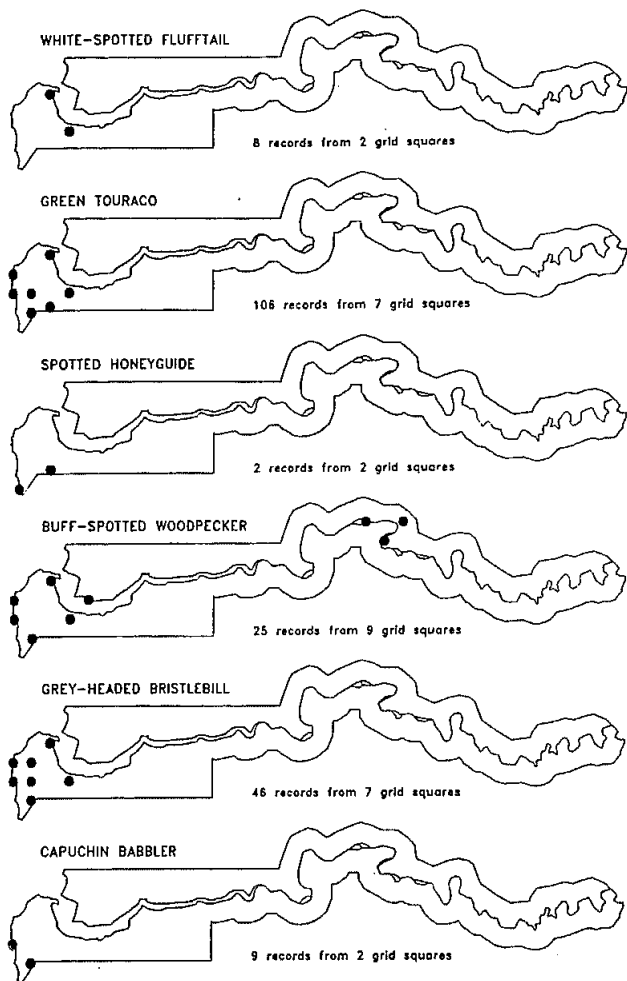


Fig. 2. Distribution of observations for selected species, 1987-1992. See text for details.



***Nicator Nicator chloris***

Three sightings Abuko, in Feb 1974, Dec 1975 and Nov 1986 (Gore 1990). Morel & Morel (1990) report some 12 observations, all in Casamance, Jan-Aug.

A single bird photographed in dense thicket in Gunjur, 11 Jul 1992 (TJW). This is the first wet-season record for The Gambia, and the first outside Abuko.

***Grey-headed Bristlebill Bleda canicapilla***

Known from Cape St. Mary, Abuko and Pirang (Gore 1990); widespread in the Casamance and present in Saloun (Morel & Morel 1990).

Forty-six records in the period 1987-1992, in all months except March and April. Additional localities include Brufut, Sanyang, Kasa Kunda, Gunjur, (JRA, CRB, MC, RMJ, FBS, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 2. Most records were at the height of the wet season, Jun-Sep, when the song aids detection.

***Leaf-love Phyllastrephus scandens***

Scarce resident in riverine forest, known from Abuko, Fajara, Howbali and Sukutu (Gore 1990). Keith *et al.* (1992) report it common in western Gambia, which it is not, though it is reasonably common in the Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990); Ericsson (1989) reports a single bird at Fajara 13 Nov 1984, but GOS has no other details. Ellenberg *et al.* (1988) reported small flocks in Pirang Forest in May 1985 and Oct 1986.

Recent records obtained on the north bank at Albreda, Dec 1990 and Oct 1992 (JRA, TJW) and from the extreme south at Gunjur, Sep 1991, Jul, Oct and Dec 1992 (FBS, TJW). At Albreda, directly across the 5 km-wide river from Pirang, three or four birds were seen in forest thicket giving distinctive calls (Dec 1990), and a pair chasing, with one bird engaging in wing shimmering displays, (Oct 1992). At least two parties were calling at Gunjur in Jul and Oct 1992. This behaviour made them readily detected at both locations, but in contemporary visits to both Pirang and Abuko, which are larger tracts of suitable habitat lying between Albreda and Gunjur, no Leaf-loves were seen or heard.

***Capuchin Babbler Phyllanthus atripennis***

Gore (1990) reports this species as of uncertain status: an old skin in the British Museum labelled The Gambia but of doubtful provenance; two good sightings from Sukuta, May-Jun 1979. Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) record six near Jambur in 1962, and a sighting in middle river, GOS does not have details of these observations. Widespread in Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

Twelve further records in forest patches at two locations in the south in 1991-1993, including photographs and evidence of possible nesting. There appears to be little published information about the Capuchin Babbler (Bannerman 1930-51, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1970-73). Colston & Curry-Lindahl (1986) note that Mt Nimba birds fed primarily on insects, that males showed enlarged testes Jul-Aug, and that they were hardly seen except when travelling with mixed bird parties".

A party of at least six or seven was seen in a small forest patch near Sanyang May-Jun 1991, Jul 1992, Nov 1992-Jan 1993, and at least two similar groups were subsequently found near Gunjur, Jun 1991. (JRA, CRB, MC, FBS, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 2.

At Sanyang on 2 Jun 1991 in a party of at least six, more than one individual was seen tugging at creepers and carrying strands of dry vegetation up under a palm frond sagging from a short, creeper-laden, Oil Palm *Elaeis guineensis*, well inside the forest thicket. The activity was centred near the trunk, c. 3 m off the ground, where it was cloaked in dense vegetation. The group also appeared to drive a sun squirrel *Heliosciurus* sp. away from the site.

The birds were not seen again despite several return visits in the following weeks, but were relocated in the same place in July 1992. A pair of West African Goshawks frequented the site and in July 1992 were nesting directly over the area where the Capuchin Babblers had been seen carrying vegetation. Several adults were seen carrying beakfuls of insect larvae at the same location on 15 Nov 1992.

At Gunjur, which is a much larger forest patch, though more isolated by open fields, parties of Capuchin Babblers were encountered moving through dense vegetation at the forest edge on three occasions, and once well into the interior under the high canopy. They fed on the ground and moved through the branches to a height of 3-4 m.

At both sites, the Brown Babbler *Turdoides plebejus* and Blackcap Babbler *T. reinwardii* were present. Capuchin Babblers and Blackcap Babblers were once (May 1991) seen together in a mixed party which included Black-throated Weavers *Ploceus nigricollis*, Grey-headed Bristlebill and Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*. These birds were scolding a source of disturbance in thicker cover.

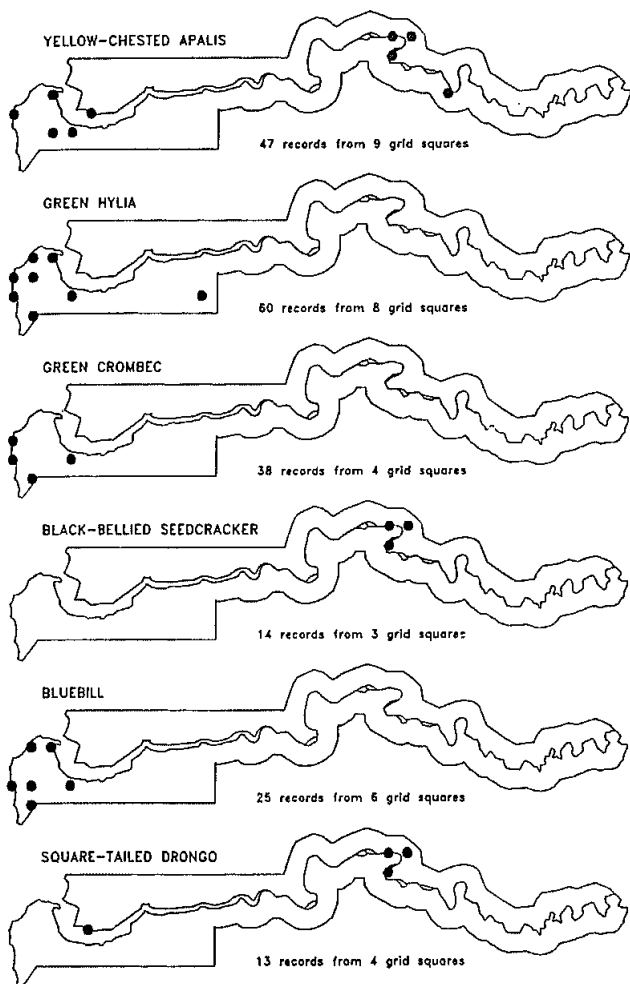
### Yellow-chested Apalis *Apalis flavida*

First recorded in The Gambia in Feb 1969; the nearest other records are in Ghana (Hall & Moreau 1970, Gore 1990). All records up to 1990 have been at Abuko, except one from Sibanor, Western Division. Morel & Morel (1990) report none from Senegal.

More than 50 records between 1987 and 1993, including all months and resulting in considerable extension of the known range. Photographed at Baboon Islands, Abuko and Pirang.

Eleven records obtained from the known site at Abuko. New sites in Western Division are Brufut, Madina Ba, Pirang, Solifor Point and Tanji. Four observations were made in a forest patch on the north bank near Albreda and 21 in MacCarthy Island Division at Baboon Islands, Gassang Forest, Nianimaru and Bansang. Observers were JRA, CRB, MC, RMJ, FBS, DKW & TJW. No records were obtained from Upper River Division. Map Fig. 3.

It is notable that this species was not previously reported from Pirang, although Ellenberg *et al.* (1988) report the Green-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera chloronota* there. *C. chloronota* is also reported in Abuko and east of The Gambia in Senegal by Morel & Morel (1990). The records detailed here certainly refer to *A. flavida*, confirmed by photographs and voice, which has been checked against recordings by Chappuis (1974-85).



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of observations for selected species, 1987-1992. See text for details.

**Green Hylia *Hylia prasina***

Scarce local resident confined to remnant forest, known from Abuko, Sukuta and Pirang (Gore 1990). Common in Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

Of 60 records of this species in the period 1987 to 1992, representing all months except April, only one lies outside the immediate coastal area south of the river, this being in a forest thicket near Brumen Bridge, 25 Nov 1990. Of the remainder, 19 records were from Abuko, 25 Brufut, 13 Pirang and one each from Sanyang, 13 Sep 1991 and Gunjur, 1 Jun 1991 (JRA, MC, RMJ, TJW). Map Fig. 3.

The loud, double whistle of this species, given once followed by a long interval of silence, and sometimes interspersed with harsh throaty rattling notes, also at long intervals, is of great assistance in detecting this elusive bird.

**Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens***

Gore (1990) does not mention this species, but quotes three old records of the Lemon-Bellied Crombec *Sylvietta denti*. Morel & Morel (1990) refer to one Green Crombec captured and two sighted in Casamance.

A small crombec with dull greenish upperparts, pale untidy supercilium, pale greyish underside with clean white vent and indistinct pale yellow smudge in centre of belly was first encountered in the forest remnant at Brufut on 21 Apr 1990. At least three birds were present, moving through the branches and leaves of small trees and shrubs, persistently flicking their wings. Confirmation of identification was built up over a series of observations of this species at five different locations, including photographs that have been compared with skins in the British Museum of Natural History. Clinching details included the flesh-coloured legs, dark upper mandible and flesh lower mandible. The song shows broad similarity with that recorded by Chappuis (1974-85) in Sierra Leone, though with minor differences. These appear to be the first records for The Gambia.

Localities include Brufut, Gunjur, Sanyang, Pirang and Tanji, with records in all months except Feb and Mar (JRA, CRB, MC, RMJ, FBS, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 3. An individual was seen carrying nesting material in Brufut on 7 Jul 1990.

The birds gave a soft "prrrt....prrrt" contact call, reminiscent of the common Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura*, as they crept in the foliage of dense thicket and canopy from near the ground to canopy level. They appeared to favour trees smothered in dense creeper growth, though four were seen in more open conditions adjacent to the forest patch at Brufut. The song was usually given from cover near the top of a bush or tree, making the bird difficult to locate. It is thin in quality but carries well, and once known, frequently heard in season: a cheerful down-scale tumble, more hurried than *S. brachyura*. In The Gambia the last one or two notes typically reverse a short way back up the scale. Song is much less prominent in the dry season. The failure to see or hear the bird at Abuko over three years, at times when it was known to be singing elsewhere, is something of a mystery.

**Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pirenestes ostrinus***

The status of this species in The Gambia has always been uncertain. Bannerman (1930-51) opined that specimens labelled The Gambia were likely to have come from further south. Gore (1990) reports records from Jabang in April and May 1959 and from Walikunda in August 1980 but expresses doubt about one from Abuko in April 1984. Jensen & Kirkeby (1980) consider it regular in Abuko, but GOS is not aware of any records from Abuko for the 1980's and early 1990's. Present in Casamance and Niokolokoba in Senegal (Morel & Morel 1990).

Fifteen recent records from the freshwater swamp forest of MacCarthy Island Division include all months except Jan, Oct and Nov. Adults, juveniles, and a nest have all been seen and photographed. Localities are Nianimaru, Gassang Forest and Baboon Islands (JRA, MC, FBS, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 3.

Gambian adults appear to have a brown mantle in both sexes; no black-backed individuals were clearly identified. The large-billed morph (Smith 1987) was clearly seen and photographed; as yet no definite observations of smaller-billed birds have been made. The birds were most commonly seen low in dense vegetation near watercourses under the forest canopy, especially in the dry season, but at the height of the wet season individuals were seen in relatively open tracts of forest (as a result of recent felling) where they fed on seeds of a sedge.

Fully-fledged, all-dark juveniles were seen at Nianimaru on 10 Mar 1991 and Gassang on 13 Jul 1991 and a nest was found at Baboon Islands on 7 Sep 1991. The nest was a globe about 30cm in diameter with a side entrance and composed of what appeared to be dry fronds of a fern. It was placed in the heart of a young screwpine *Pandanus* sp., about 1 m above ground level under a dense canopy of *Raphia*, creepers, and other trees on a small island. The site was flooded daily by tidal freshwater to a depth of c. 20 cm. The adult was presumed to be incubating; once flushed from the nest it was very reluctant to leave the area, and when in the nest remained quiet for long periods.

**Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina***

Known from Abuko and Western Division (Gore 1990); widespread in the Casamance (Morel & Morel 1990).

More than 30 additional recent records, with new locations at Bijilo Forest, Sanyang, Kasa Kunda, Pirang and Gunjur, scattered throughout the year (Jan, Mar, Jun-Sep, Nov) (JRA, MC, DKW, TJW). Map Fig. 3.

It is clear from records collected by visiting bird-watchers (not used in this paper) that the confusion between this species and the Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens*, (Gore 1990) still persists. From 1987 to date several *M. nitens* have been reported from Abuko, none with supporting notes. Some of these probably refer to the Bluebill. The current status of *M. nitens* in The Gambia remains unclear; it must be regarded as at best extremely elusive and probably very rare. Its presence requires verification.

### Discussion

The species discussed above are at their northern limit near the West African coast. The forest fragments that remain in The Gambia have been much reduced in recent years, and continue to be under great pressure. If they disappear, nearly all the species listed in this article will go from the country with them, reducing the range of each in the process. However, nearly all the rarer forest-adapted species historically documented for the country were still present in the last few years. Furthermore new species are still being found, such as the Green Crombec. The remaining network of small forest patches (Abuko at 70 ha is the biggest), appears still to support all the species reported above. Protection from felling and fires may secure them into the future. The forest birds are an especially attractive group within the national avifauna, and the birds of The Gambia already attract important tourist income. Other advantages of forests extend far beyond bird conservation. It is very much to be hoped that conservation and forestry interests can cooperate to preserve the remaining natural forests of The Gambia.

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